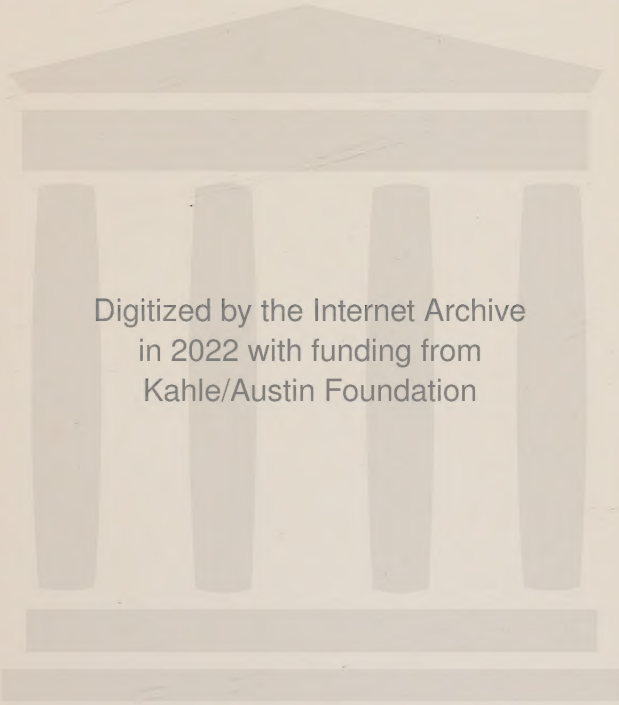




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Rachel Sylvestre

A STORY OF THE PIONEERS

BY

JESSIE BROWN POUNDS

Author of Roderick Wayne, A Woman's Doing, The Iron Clad Pledge,
Norman McDonald, A Popular Idol, Runaway, Etc., Etc.

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RACHEL SYLVESTRE:

A STORY OF THE PIONEERS

JESSIE BROWN POUNDS

A WORD BEFOREHAND.

It is the year of our Lord, Eighteen Hundred and Eighty-two, and I, Joseph Arrondale, am seventy-six years old.

As the years come, I feel the garrulity of old age creeping upon me. At first it manifested itself in my tongue, and threatened to make me a nuisance to my neighbors, who had before this regarded me as an inoffensive and rather slow-spoken old man, not at all given to reminiscences. But, fortunately for them, it may be, my increasing deafness has shut me off more and more from the society of my fellows; so I have taken to my pen, which is certainly, in my case, a comparatively harmless instrument.

Fifty years ago, when I was a country schoolteacher, my goose-quill was my companion through many a night, spent before the roaring hearth-fire. I could sharpen it a bit, too, for the sake of a sly thrust at some adversary in our little debating school. But now for many years I have been little accustomed to use the pen, and as I take it up I find it speaks no language but that of memory. It is in the past that an old man lives. It is of the past that I wish to write.

There are few left who will care for my memories. At seventy-six every man is in a sense an exile—at the best, a wayfarer, who lies down to sleep in a tent by the roadside, and dreams of reunions that are to be.

But I am not yet quite alone. Some of those whose blood is akin to mine are still spared to me. And there

is a certain four-year-old boy, by name Sylvestre Arrondale the Third, for whose eyes I pen these pages. Those eyes are dark and soft, like a pair I once knew; and this is one of the many reasons why I love the child.

Long before Sylvestre Arrondale the Third shall be old enough to understand what I shall try to write, all those who carry these memories in their hearts will have passed away. And so I set them down, in my clumsy fashion, not only because the story itself may give him passing pleasure, but because it is the story of those from whose blood the fountains of his own life are filled. To know their history may help him to understand his own nature and to guide his course aright.

I shall have as little as possible to say of myself, beyond what is necessary to set forth the lives of others better, and better worth knowing, than I. The boy who reads these pages may guess some things concerning the lonely old man who writes them, which are nowhere set down in so many words. There is much, indeed, which I have sought neither to reveal nor to conceal, that belongs of right, if he shall choose to read it, to the boy whose eyes have the Past written in them.

Since I must in any case soon leave this world, I wish to stand to record here that I leave it with no bitter feeling toward any, dead or living. If I tell the faults of some who have long been dust, it is only that other lives may be understood and rightly judged.

And I desire to bear witness, at the close of a long life, not free from heavy sorrows, that God has been good, that my seventy-six years have been meted out in mercy, and that when the call shall come to go to him and to those he is keeping for me, I shall be glad I have lived and glad to die.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRONDALES.

There were two of us, Stephen and Joseph Arrondale, with a gap of six years between us. We were alike, except that in everything Stephen was stronger than I. I never came within four inches of his stature, although I am by no means a short man. He was fleeter of foot than I, and surer of aim, and had more endurance in the woods or the harvest-field.

When it came to books, we were more nearly matched. He used indeed to say that I went ahead of him here, but this was not true. Perhaps I was a little quicker with my pen or with figures, but he was patient and clear-headed, and he loved to know; so, in the end, I think he was beyond me.

We had grown up in the woods of northeastern Ohio, but with advantages a little beyond those of our neighbors. My father was a Connecticut man, with a quick wit and a knack at making money by honest dealing. I have often thought that he must have been born with a knowledge of the world, for it seemed that so much of it could not have been acquired in one short lifetime.

He made many good bargains; the best one he made when he married my mother. I have heard him say that when he, the enterprising Yankee farm-boy, asked her, the bonny little Yankee school-ma'am, to marry him and go with him to the wilds of Ohio, she said, "Why, Samuel! you didn't suppose I'd let you go alone, did you?"

My mother always laughed at this story, and said father would make a good novel-writer—he was so good at inventing. But we boys knew very well that she loved my

father with a beautiful, self-forgetful love, and that her pride and faith in him had made him a far better man than he could ever have been without her.

How shall I describe my mother? I shall tell you of more beautiful women by and by, but her face had a light upon it such as I have never seen on any other. She did not often say "God bless you!" to us boys, but she looked it every time she spoke. I have never known any other woman, past her early girlhood, who laughed so much. I know now that she must have laughed sometimes when her heart was heavy, but I did not guess it then. I only thought how that light ripple of laughter was like the sound of the brook in the meadow, as it flowed over the pebbles and went to join the larger stream just beyond the mill. I suppose this is why, even now when I am an old man, the sight of a clear stream flowing over white pebbles always makes me think of mother.

She was the daughter of a minister, who had ventured beyond the customs of the time and taught her Latin and algebra. Those of our neighbors who were a little jealous on account of her accomplishments called her strong-minded. But most of them liked her, and merely said that she was "smart."

The death of her father and mother had early thrown her upon her own resources, but she had found it easy to gather together a little school from among the children of her friends. She had not needed her Latin and algebra, but she kept both stored away in her memory, and they came into use when she had two book-loving boys of her own to teach.

She was a deeply pious woman, a Christian by instinct, a Baptist by inheritance, and a Calvinist by logic. Given wrong premises, and there was never a more logical system than Calvinism. I heard my bright-witted mother argue

it all over with my father a hundred times, as I lay in my trundle bed and watched the snapping pine-knot fire, and I wondered each time at the neatness with which she fitted foreordination into predestination, and predestination into sovereignty, and all the rest. But even then I wondered if she didn't mentally quarrel with her false premises, and reason all the harder to keep down the questionings of her loving heart.

Father was not religious, and this was that dear heart's heaviest burden. He listened pleasantly enough to my mother, but in the end he would always say: "Well, Abigail, I don't see but what the Lord has settled the question; so there is nothing for you and me to do. I'd like to bear you company in the next world, but as long as I'm not called in that direction I see nothing for it but to go with you as far as I can, and say good-by to you when I must."

This hurt her a little, for I suppose she thought it was said to tease her. Besides, she loved my father so much that I am sure she was terrified at the thought of spending the future apart from him. So she usually stopped talking for that time. But it would not be long until the question came up again, to be dropped again in the same way.

The Western Reserve was later settled than other portions of Ohio, so that my father and mother were pioneers.

My father cleared his patch of ground and built his one-room cabin, and there Stephen was born. The clearing was a large one when I came into the world, but I was ten years old before the first log cabin was superseded by another and larger one.

Our neighbors were for the most part Connecticut people, like my parents, as poor as they were, and no poorer. This is as much as to say that there was no poverty at all among us, for where there is equality there is no burden.

Stephen and I went to school in winter barefooted, or with home-made sandals of bark strapped upon our feet, but we did not suffer, either in our feet or our pride. There were other bare-footed boys at school, and our blood was young and warm.

I think I was about eight years old when father came in one day and said:

“We are to have new neighbors, Abigail. That man from the East, who has been looking around here for a week or two, has bought out Richard Sandborn. He seems to have plenty of money—so they say.”

And, not being a prophet at eight years old, I little dreamed what the coming of the Sylvestres would mean to Stephen's life and mine.

CHAPTER II.

THE SYLVESTRES.

It is about our neighbors, rather than about ourselves, that I shall try to write. If, in spite of this promise, I have a good deal to say about the Arrondales, you will understand it is because the Arrondales get in the way of my story, and have to be got out.

The first time I ever saw the Sylvestres was, as I have already hinted, when I was about eight years old. We were to have a three months' school that summer, and Stephen was to go, though he was fourteen years old, and other boys of his age were kept at home for the sake of the farm work. Mother always insisted that we must have such a chance at study as we could get, and father always gave in to her about it. I think he liked to give in to mother.

Serena Bly was to teach the school. Mother thought highly of Serena, because she had "government." From the toes of her ample shoes to the top of her big horn comb she seemed to represent correct discipline; and we all respected the representation. It was said that she had quelled three schools from which the male teachers had been forcibly ejected by mutinous pupils.

The Blue Brook school was a comparatively easy one, and I suppose that Serena took it after many trying experiences in the line of discipline, just as she might have picked up her knitting-work after doing a large washing. It was mere play to her. But none of us who knew her fame ever dreamed that it would be play for her pupils.

Serena could parse, too, and had, far and wide, the distinction of being "a good grammarian." It was said

that she had parsed every sentence in "Paradise Lost," merely for recreation; and that she knew every grammatical pitfall in Young's "Night Thoughts." I never had occasion to test her knowledge as far as this, and so I can not vouch for the truth of the statement. But I can see her sharp, green-gray eyes, even now, watching my early struggles with the mysterious science of language, and can recall the catlike little springs she used to make at my failures, as she cried out, "*What* case did you say?"

It was not easy to secure a teacher who even professed a knowledge of grammar; so the district took a natural pride in Serena.

The morning that school "took up," Stephen and I started out early, in the hope that some of the other boys would be early also, and that we might have a play before going to our task. When houses are half a mile apart, boys are naturally scarce articles, and we seldom had playmates except at school.

We had gone as far as Blue Brook—the little stream from which the schoolhouse got its name—and were in sight of the schoolhouse, when we saw two little girls trudging on ahead of us. They had on blue calico dresses and pink sunbonnets, and I remember that the larger one had pushed back her bonnet so that it hung by the strings about her neck. The most remarkable thing about them, to my eye, was the fact that they both wore shoes. I had never before seen a child wearing shoes in mild weather and on a week-day.

"They are the new people," Stephen said. "They are from the East. That's why they're dressed up so."

We had grown up with the idea, which I suppose our mother must have given us unconsciously, that all Eastern people were elegant and polished. I looked at the little girls with a new curiosity.

When we overtook them we found them in difficulty. Some one had taken away the bridge of logs that usually spanned Blue Brook, and there was no way to cross except by wading.

"We'll spoil our shoes, Rachel," the little one was saying. "And we'll get all wet—you know we will." She seemed just ready to cry.

I think it was as easy for Stephen to be kind to people as it was to breathe. "Never mind, girls," he said. "I'll carry you over. I have no shoes to spoil, you see."

The little sister looked out shyly from under her pink bonnet. I can see the great brown eyes and the sweep of their long curling lashes, even now. I have loved and watched the beauty of childhood all my life, but I still think hers was the most beautiful child-face I have ever seen. I wish I had a picture of it, to put beside that of little Sylvestre Arrondale.

The older girl looked first anxious and then determined. Her face was as striking as that of her sister, but her eyes were sharper, and the lines less delicate. "I'm too big to be carried," she said. (She was, as I learned afterwards, exactly eight years old—four months younger than I.) "Besides, I don't know you." She sat down on the bank and began to take off her shoes.

"Mayn't he carry *me*?" begged the little sister.

Stephen did not wait for Rachel's answer. He picked up the little creature, carried her across, and held her by the hand until Rachel came over, holding her shoes and stockings tightly grasped in one small brown hand.

I did not like Rachel, for I thought she had snubbed us. But Stephen was fourteen, and I suppose no girl of eight could put him out of countenance.

He actually got down on the ground and dried Rachel's feet with his clean slate-cloth. I hated her for accepting

this act of condescension from one so far her superior, and especially for her scanty acknowledgment of it. I was not used to seeing people slight Stephen, and if I had not liked little Martha so well I should have set her sister down as a contemptible little aristocrat, worthy of no further thought.

But Stephen was magnanimous by nature, and as we parted at the schoolhouse door he patted Martha's hand and said, "I'll carry you over every morning, if you want me to. And your sister, too, if she'll let me."

The schoolhouse was of logs, with slab benches and puncheon floors. We boys dug our bare toes down between the logs of the floor and into the chinking of the walls, as we sat at the plank desk which ran around the outside of the room and wrestled with our pot-hooks. I was just learning to use the quill, which afterward brought me so much happiness; but Stephen was already quite an artist with his, and Serena had written at the top of his sheet of foolscap, in bold script, the copy,

"Many men of many minds;
Many birds of many kinds."

We were in the very midst of these exercises when a chorus of screams arose on the girls' side of the house. In a moment half the girls in the room were standing on the slab benches, and many of them were crying noisily.

It did not take me long to discover the cause of the disturbance. A common striped snake had crawled up through a crevice in the floor, and was calmly surveying the situation. This was a frequent enough occurrence, but snakes are something that women folks never seem to get used to.

The two Sylvestre girls were quite near me. Martha had climbed upon a bench, and was hiding her face in her sister's dress. I dare say that Rachel was frightened, but she

patted Martha's hand and whispered to her not to be afraid.

In a moment Stephen had seized the shovel, which chanced to lie near, and had made an end of the reptile. In another moment Serena Bly, who had been busy in another part of the room, was upon us, and saw what had happened.

"For shame, girls!" she said. "Afraid of a harmless reptile! If you make such a disturbance again, you will be punished severely—every one of you. As for you, Stephen Arrondale, you have been very unnecessarily officious. If you kill any more snakes without permission, you will feel the cut of the birch afterward."

I thought little Martha was rather more terrified by this harsh speech than she had been by the snake. Rachel's nostrils quivered, and I thought she was on the verge of "answering back" to Serena Bly. It was well for her that she controlled herself.

As for the rest of us, we cared little for Serena's threats, not because we doubted their sincerity, but because threat and punishment were both so familiar to us that we took them as a matter of course. Children were far less considered in those days than they are now, and we accepted life as we found it.

I noticed that, at the noon hour, while the rest of us laughed and chatted over the contents of our dinner pails, the Sylvestre girls sat by themselves and ate in silence. I think they were too proud to make overtures to the other girls, and the other girls were too bashful to approach them. As I have said before, we were not used, in Blue Brook school, to children with shces on.

It was a great surprise to Stephen and me, when school was over, to find Rachel and Martha waiting for us.

"You are a good boy," said Rachel, looking straight into Stephen's eyes. "It was brave of you to kill the snake. If that woman had tried to hurt you, I would have made her stop."

I was about to explain the difficulty of this proceeding, but Stephen gave me no chance. "What are boys for, except to kill snakes?" he asked, smiling.

"And carry girls over the river," put in Martha, shyly.

"That isn't a very big river," Stephen told her. (We were back at Blue Brook by this time.) "But there is no need to carry you over now. We boys came out and put the logs back where they belong. Take hold of my hand, and you will find it a fine way to cross."

As I have said before, I was only eight years old, but I considered myself a very long way from babyhood. So my dignity received a severe shock when Rachel, stepping on the log first, turned and said to me, carelessly, "You can take hold of my hand, if you want to, little boy." But I took her hand, and knew that I was honored.

After that, for many years, it was our habit to walk home with the Sylvestre girls. In time, I grew used to Rachel's fine airs, and grew rather to admire them. As for Martha, she had no fine airs, and was everybody's darling.

I remember that my feelings received quite a shock when I learned what accomplished persons our new acquaintances were. I could read in the spelling-book as far over as "baker," and considered myself quite advanced. But little Martha, who was only six years old, was assigned to read with me; and I found that, in spite of a most bewitching lisp, she read quite as well as I did. As for Rachel, she, when asked to show her reading-book, walked up to the teacher with a neat calico-covered copy of "The American Preceptor," and read, as I told Stephen afterward, "like talking." It was the first time I had

taken hold of the idea that reading and talking had anything in common.

The proficiency of the two little girls was quite a spur to me. I told my mother about the "American Preceptor," and I think the matter touched her pride a little, for heretofore her boys had been considered rather in advance of the other children of the neighborhood. So she got out for me Stephen's discarded book. (He read now in the "English Reader," and knew pages of its selections from Addison and Johnson by heart.) When my chores were done at night I used to sit on the doorstep, with the last rays of daylight on my page, spelling out the words; and now and then my mother would come to look over my shoulder, to help me with a hard word, and to say, "Keep right at it, my boy, and you'll be up with Rachel Sylvestre, sometime."

My hour of triumph did indeed come. Before the term was over, one morning, when I had won special favor in Miss Serena's eyes, she advanced to face the entire school, and announced, in the tone of one conferring a title:

"Hereafter, Joseph Arrondale will read with Rachel Sylvestre."

There, now! I wonder if I am not saying more about the Arrondales than about the Sylvestres!

CHAPTER III.

THE HARVEST DANCE.

There have been times in my life when it seemed to me a pity that we did not always stay children.

Talk about "achievement" and "possession"! Who is the richest landed proprietor in the world, if it is not the little child? He owns all of the earth that he can see,—its wooded hills, its daisy-starred meadows, its fertile valleys. He owns acres and acres of the blue sky above him, and would scorn to part with even a small strip of his possessions. He is inclined to think that a corner of the moon, and one or two of the stars, belong to his portion, and that he will go up and survey them as soon as street car connections shall have been established.

It is a temptation to me, now that the old man's love of what is remote is upon me, to write of those days when life was new, and when the voices of the world had not drowned the songs of birds or the whispers of angels.

But I know my weakness, and realize that these pages will never be filled out if I permit myself to dally by the way.

In our way we grew up, Stephen and I. It was not the worst way. Stephen was, as I said at the beginning, a tall, fine fellow, a little shy and quiet, but open and manly, clean and honest, with a skillful hand and a tender heart. As I have also said before, I seemed on the surface somewhat like him, but I was in every way less a man. In all ways there was more than the difference of our years between us. We both had a bit of temper. Mine has lasted, but his was conquered early,—poor lad!

It was the summer after my seventeenth birthday. Stephen and I were working through haying at Colonel Sylvestre's, not for money, but for neighborliness. Most of the young men of the community were there, for in those days of the slow scythe and cradle the operation of haying and harvesting was a serious one.

Yet, on the whole, it was more of a frolic than a task. We dared one another to daily competition in our work, and made merry over it with song and story. Stephen was a fine singer, and his companions called on him every day for the few songs he knew.

We were royally feasted, for Mrs. Sylvestre and Rachel were famous cooks, and they served us with their best. My own folks were frugal livers, and the table set for us at the Sylvestres' seemed to me like splendid luxury. I remember to have been surprised at the quantity of crockery set forth, and to have wondered how my mother managed to get along with such a slender stock as she possessed.

Colonel Sylvestre—he had been in the war of 1812—was the most imposing man, both in looks and manner, that I had ever seen. He was six-feet-four, portly but not heavy, and with a soldierlike carriage which seemed to make his slightest movements important. His hair was prematurely white, and he wore it long, even for the fashion. His talk was entirely unlike that of any other man I knew. He had read a great deal, and his sentences had a stately, high-stepping style that contrasted oddly with the Yankee-Ohio dialect of the backwoods.

Mrs. Sylvestre was a dark, angular woman, with an intellectual face and sad, brown eyes. Rachel had her cut of features, but without her angularity or her sadness of expression.

People were beginning to call Rachel a beautiful girl. She was as slim and graceful as a willow-tree, and her great eyes flashed and glowed and cooled like the embers on the hearth. I remember to have wondered one day, as she flitted here and there and cut slices of her own snowy bread and poured out fragrant coffee for the hungry men, whether any sorrow or change could sharpen her face into a spiritual likeness to her mother.

What made Mrs. Sylvestre a sad woman I could not guess. Judged by the narrow standards which my experience afforded me, her lot was most fortunate. Her husband had more land and honors than any other man in the neighborhood, and her daughters were envied by every girl for miles around. Perhaps the look of sadness was, after all, only an expression she wore through habit, as she wore the neat white cap over glossy locks which certainly no one could care to conceal.

Rachel was her father's pride, and Martha was his pet. I fancy girls were older at seventeen and fifteen then than they are now. At any rate, the young girls I see about me nowadays seem to me much less staid and womanly than these seemed then. Rachel kept her father's accounts with exquisite neatness, and Martha's needlework was the pride of the neighborhood. Their accomplishments were those of a by-gone time, no doubt, but they were womanly and daughterly, and at the time they were thought of highly.

Rachel sang well, though she had never had what they call now "voice culture." She seemed to dislike anything like parade of her talent, but her father was very proud of it, and often asked her to sing for us in the evening.

"My eldest daughter has a melodious voice, albeit not strong," the colonel used to say. I think Rachel's voice

was fairly strong, but it was not considered proper for a man to give his children unqualified praise.

One night Stephen asked Rachel to sing, "Come, Ye Disconsolate." He did not care for the religious sentiment of the hymn, perhaps, but its associations meant much to him, for it was a favorite with our mother. Beyond this, the noble air, no doubt, appealed to his ear.

Rachel frowned slightly, and looked at her father. He shook his head. "I think Rachel is not in the habit of singing the piece you mention," he said, with grand politeness.

Martha slipped her hand into her father's. "I think it is a beautiful piece," she said, with her winsome smile.

Her father smiled back at her indulgently, but Rachel sang no more that night.

The incident would have made no impression upon me, had it not called up the statement I had often heard, that Colonel Sylvestre was a bitter infidel, and that he kept "The Age of Reason" on his table instead of the Bible. I had never heard him say anything about his opinions, but no doubt they had influenced Rachel, who was the constant companion of her father.

We boys slept on the hay in the big barn. I have slept on few better beds since, judging from the soundness of my slumbers.

One night some one proposed an impromptu dance on the floor of this same barn. Colonel Sylvestre sanctioned the idea very heartily, but cautioned us about using lights, as there was still a quantity of old hay in the loft, and a strawstack just outside.

"The amusement of the young people is a very desirable object," he said, in his fine way, "but scarcely to be purchased at the cost of my buildings and stock."

"The moonlight is good enough for us," said Ross Turner, who was keen for the frolic. "We can see enough by it to have a power of fun."

The colonel compromised by allowing torches for the fiddlers, and, our day's work being done, Stephen and I started off in a big wagon to gather up the girls in the neighborhood. Thus informal was society, even among the upper ten, in that far-agone time of which I write.

I tell things as they were. The farmer who did not set forth good whisky for his hands in harvest was accounted mean and miserly. Colonel Sylvestre's whisky was good and plentiful, and some of those who had partaken of it freely in the harvest field that day partook still more freely at the dance. The whisky was a better article than the vile stuff which bears that name to-day, but it was whisky.

Ross Turner, long before the evening was over, became even more silly than nature had made him. Arabel Holecomb needed nothing to improve upon nature. He made foolish jokes, and she giggled at them until he thought they were good. Between drink and vanity, he was in a pitiable state.

Rachel danced but a few times. I suspect that she cared little for our rude amusements, though she made pretense that her duties as hostess kept her busy.

About ten o'clock, Ross Turner sauntered up to Rachel and said, in a familiar way, "Come on and have a turn, Rachel."

Talk about seeing things in people's faces! I wonder if any other face ever showed as much as Rachel's did that night, when she turned to Ross, her nostrils dilating and her eyes flashing, and said, in the terribly quiet voice I learned to know well afterward, "If I dance, I shall dance with *a man!*"

Ross slunk away, and I saw him no more that night. In a moment Stephen came up, and said, "Are you not going to dance with me just once, Rachel?"

She did not turn her head toward him, but she answered, pleasantly enough:

"Not just now. Ask me again in half an hour, and I will tell you."

He must have asked her again, for in half an hour they were moving over the floor, and everybody was looking after them. They were both tall. He was nobly built, and she was exquisitely graceful. Both had a certain high-born manner, which I do not know how to describe, but which seemed in a way to set them apart from the other young people of the neighborhood. Perhaps it was family pride that put the idea into my head, but it seemed to me that the young women were envying Rachel almost as much as the young men envied Stephen.

Once, as they came near me, I heard Stephen say, "Oh, but this is pleasure!"

And in the light of the torches I thought I saw a little frown on Rachel's face, as she answered:

"It has always seemed to me a rather childish pleasure."

I was not at all displeased with this, as I was young enough to think it rather charming for a pretty girl to be perverse.

When Rachel came by again, she asked me to go to the house and look for Martha, who had mysteriously vanished.

As I entered the unlighted kitchen, I heard Martha saying:

"But you do not think it wicked to dance, do you, mother? I will never do it any more, if I make you unhappy."

“No, no, child—do not mind me at all. I do not think it is wicked. I wish you to please your father in all things, as you know. I was brought up differently, and I can not enter into your pleasures, but I have no desire to deprive you of them. Go back and enjoy yourself, my child.”

I would have slipped out without being seen, but the jar of the door betrayed me. Martha was kneeling on the floor, with her hands in her mother’s lap. I could see only outlines in the moonlight, but I guessed there were tears in the girl’s eyes. She sprang to her feet.

“It is I—Joseph,” I said. “Rachel has sent me to say she needs you,” I said awkwardly. But Mrs. Sylvestre spoke at once:

“Go back to your company, daughter. You have been away from them too long already.”

I thought Martha was trembling as we went back to the barn. She was a loving, sensitive creature, and could never bear to have any one near her unhappy.

“Mother’s parents were very strict Presbyterians,” she said; “they thought dancing and all such amusements were wrong. She agrees with father about all such things now, only she can’t get used to them. I’m so sorry!”

It was two o’clock in the morning when the gaiety was over. The girls were to be Rachel’s guests for the rest of the night. As for us boys, we tumbled down upon the hay in our loft with scanty ceremony.

I was not tired. I was only a boy, but I, too, had danced that night with Rachel Sylvestre.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAMP-MEETING.

It was only a month or so later that we heard there was a camp-meeting going on in Fullman's woods only six miles away. Excitements were scarce in those days, and we never thought of missing anything that came in our way, whether it was a dance or a camp-meeting.

We had worked hard ever since spring opened, and felt that we deserved whatever amusement we could find. I am ashamed to say that we included camp-meetings in our list of amusements, but such was the case.

I was not in the least inclined to be religious. I admired my mother's beautiful piety, and should have missed it if it had gone from her as I should have missed the light from her dear eyes. But I do not think I had realized, at this time, that it was her piety that made her the dear mother she was. I thought of it as one of her many adornments,—that was all.

Unconsciously, I had fallen into our father's careless way of speaking about religious matters. I went to all kinds of religious meetings or to none, as the fit took me, and got about equal pleasure out of the fervent exhortations of the Methodist circuit-rider and the severely logical disquisitions of the Hardshell Baptist preacher who appeared once in two or three months at Bluebrook school-house. To each in turn I listened with some curiosity. So far as I remember, none awakened within me a sense of personal responsibility or even a desire for larger knowledge. I am not at all proud to tell this, but it was the fact.

To-night the chief attraction was not the camp-meeting, but the fact that seven or eight of the young people were to

take the ride together in a big wagon. For some reason, I can not now understand why, the Sylvestre girls were to be of this number. I say I can not understand why, because Rachel and Martha seldom joined in the rough frolics of the neighborhood, and were thought to be rather exclusive. I suppose their mother's ideas of propriety must have been more strict than those that generally obtained in our primitive society. But for some reason the girls were with us to-night, and entered into the spirit of the occasion with more than their usual animation.

Ross Turner was in the company, and kept close to Rachel. It was said that he had followed her like a mastered dog, ever since she had snubbed him so at the harvest dance. Stephen thought the lazy fellow wanted a strip of Colonel Sylvestre's land. I thought and still think that he was paying tribute to his conqueror.

The ride through the August twilight was beautiful enough to set one's pulses beating to the voiceless music which was in the air. I was ever a lover of the out of doors, and I confess that for me there was more pleasure in the dream the outer world awakened in the inner, than in the light talk of the boys and girls who rode with me.

For the most part we were passing through dense woods, with the faint gray light coming through the opening cut for a road. Now and then we came to a clearing, and to the stubble-fields from which nature had gathered her harvests, and where she seemed to walk content with the year's work done.

"Joe's in love!" said Ross Turner, at last. I do not know what he or his companions had been saying before, but his coarse words recalled me to myself.

"What do you mean?" I asked rather hotly. I have always been of quick blood, and then I was but a boy.

"I mean I've spoken to you twice, and have got

no answer," said Ross, with his ill-natured grin. "Your wits are wool-gathering. It is plain that you are in love."

I was ready to give him an ugly answer, for I took fire at every foolish provocation. It would be pleasanter when we are old to remember none but pleasant things of ourselves, but I tell the story as it was.

"If Joe is in love, it is with one of his story-book girls," Stephen said. "It is of Rebecca or Rowena that he dreams, not of the pretty girls hereabouts.

"I hope it is of Rebecca, and not Rowena," said Rachel, with a flash of her dark eyes.

"Why not of Rowena?" I asked, laughingly, though I thought I knew what she would say.

"Because Rebecca was worth dreaming about, not a bundle of millinery for men to lose their senses over."

"But is not Rowena the most womanly character?" I asked; not because I thought so, but because I wanted to hear her answer.

"Is it not womanly to be brave and true? Was Rebecca more or less than that? The old and the sick and the little children have a right to be helpless and dependent, but a woman's place need not be with these classes, need it?"

"It not only need not be, but it is not," said Stephen, speaking with a great deal of firmness. "I admire Rebecca, but I admire Rowena, too. A woman may be brave and true, and still keep to the ordinary path of a woman's life. Extraordinary heroism is seldom demanded of any one, either man or woman."

Ross Turner had not read Sir Walter Scott's novels, which we had borrowed of Colonel Sylvestre the previous winter, and had devoured with the avidity of book-hungry boys. He was annoyed by talk in which he had no part,

and began to tell what he had heard of the camp-meeting which we were to attend.

"They're getting a big crowd of mourners," he said. "Jack Dasher and the Bailey girls went up night before last. I'll go you what you please that Jack don't hold out six months. I see him yesterday, and I says, 'Hulloa, Jack, got any religion to spare? I'm pretty nigh strapped myself.' 'No,' he says, real serious-like, 'I'm a-seekin', but I ain't through yet.' Just wait till chopping-time comes, and we'll catch him swearing in fine style."

"Seeking!" said Rachel, with a curve of her lip and the tilt to her nose that always seemed to give her a scornful expression. "I wonder what they think they are seeking. What nonsense it all is, anyway!"

I can not tell you how this speech startled me. It seemed as if some one had given me a sharp, sudden blow. As I have said, I was not religious, but through my mother's devotion I had learned to look upon piety as a necessary grace of womanhood. I think I must have considered that religion is in some sense natural to women, and that it is easier for them to care for such things than it is for men. I am sure now that I was wrong, and I set down this boyish opinion here merely to show why Rachel's opinion surprised and well-nigh shocked me.

"Foolishness, for sure," said Ross, quite pleased to hear such an expression from Rachel. "Religion is all right for old folks, but we ain't ready to die and go to heaven yet—eh, Rachel?"

"I don't see what being old has got to do with it," she said, her upper lip still curving. "A thing that isn't true, isn't true. A fable is no more truth to a dying man than it is to you or me, although he may be more ready to be-

lieve it. A drowning man will catch at straws—or at doctrines.’’

Stephen’s firm voice broke in again. “Do you mean that you think the whole thing a delusion?” he asked.

“How can it be anything else? It is a beautiful dream, but beauty without truth is a dream with an awakening.”

Martha had not heard our talk. She was sitting on the back seat beside Arabel Holcomb, and the two girls were chattering gaily, now and then breaking out in a fragment of some popular song. In those days Martha seemed lighter of heart and more companionable than her sister. Rachel was often gay, and always quick of tongue, but she seemed at times to be burdened, as if with thinking thoughts beyond her age. It may be that her father’s opinions had something to do with this.

As we approached the camp-ground, a burst of song greeted us. The scene was picturesque enough—the crowd of worshipers in the shadow of the great trees and of the gathering night, their faces showing first dark and then light in the uncertain flame of the pine knots burning here and there.

Three or four itinerant preachers, whom I knew by sight, walked up and down in front of the congregation, clapping their hands and keeping time to the music with ecstatic shouts. A local preacher of the neighborhood lined out the hymn. It chanced to be that fine composition of Lady Huntington’s which I afterward learned to love:

“When Thou, my righteous Judge, shall come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?”

Careless as I was, the words arrested my attention, even then. Perhaps what I had just heard Rachel say had something to do with it. I know I thought that, if

the religion my mother and many other good people believed in were true, I should be but poorly prepared to stand at the judgment seat.

You may be sure our company did not join the circle of worshipers. We threw ourselves down on some logs, just within sound of the preachers' voices, and I fear we were, for the most part, very poor listeners. Other young people began to straggle in, some coming in wagon-loads and some on horseback. They were mostly, like ourselves, bent on fun, and we were acquainted with them all, for in those times we knew our neighbors in the next township better than you of to-day know your neighbors in the next block. So we exchanged jokes and gossip in undertones, and almost forgot that we were attending a religious meeting.

It was only when the "seekers" were called to the mourners' bench that we became really interested. Little Livonia Bailey was one of the first to go. She cried much and seemed much distressed because of her sins; but when the local preacher, in adjuring her to forsake "worldly vanities," pointed to the string of gold beads about her white throat, she sat suddenly upright, and would kneel in prayer no more.

Jack Dasher, on the contrary, was humble and persistent. I liked the determined look of his face, though I could not make out what he was determined upon. He prayed noisily, but in monosyllables; and at last he sprang to his feet, shouting, "I got it! I got it! I got it!" and leaped to and fro in the excess of joy. Whereupon the believers broke into a chorus of "Amen!"

Within the prayer circle was Wesley Wyatt, son of the local preacher who lined the hymns. He had been a schoolmate of Stephen's and mine, and we did not like him. So far as I now remember, there was nothing wrong

about him, except that his piety, though no doubt sincere, was of the unctuous and ostentatious sort.

As he walked up and down, encouraging the mourners to continue seeking, Wesley caught sight of us. He made his way through the circle and came at once to where we were sitting.

Martha chanced to claim his attention first. "Child, have you found free grace?" he asked.

"No-o," she answered, timidly, and shrank closer to Rachel.

Wesley evidently did not think the older sister a favorable subject for his attentions. He turned to Stephen.

"Will you not flee from the wrath to come?" he demanded.

"What about your fleeing from what's already here?" asked Stephen.

Wesley walked quickly back to the circle he had just quitted, and, in the next lull, his voice was raised in what he evidently considered a prayer.

"O Lord," he said, in a voice of seven thunders, "I desire to ask of thee the soul of Stephen Arrondale. Thou knowest what his heart is. Thou knowest that he seeks the company of the godless and scorns the counsels of the righteous. And thou knowest that at this very moment, while he laughs at the danger that threatens and mocks the voice that calls to repentance, that he is hair-hung and breeze-shaken over the gulf of everlasting perdition!"

I hate to write it of the best man I have known in this world, but I believe that if Wesley Wyatt had been within reach at the moment, Stephen would have thrashed him.

CHAPTER V.

MARTHA.

I will say for myself that I never once thought of blaming religion or even Methodism on account of Wesley Wyatt's very pointed prayer. I thought it due to his conceit and his mistaken estimate of his own virtues, and mentally decided to tell him my opinion when we should next meet.

He had scarcely ended his prayer when a good woman from our own neighborhood arose, and began to relate a marvelous experience. She had seen a bright light shining in the heavens at midnight, so she said, and had heard a voice calling, though she had not been able to make out the words. It was so much like the call of Saul of Tarsus that she had known immediately it was meant for her, and had begun at once to shout for joy.

I had heard the sister's story a good many times, and was not deeply interested in it. So I was rather relieved when an excited brother broke into the pious hymn, beginning

"The devil hates the Methodists."

"I agree with the devil," said Ross Turner at my elbow. Young men who try to be smart can make themselves disagreeable in any age.

I heard a little sob behind me, and saw that little Martha was crying.

Rachel had evidently seen it, too, for she was watching Martha with a peculiar expression on her face. It might have been indignation or pity, or the two combined. Rachel

saw that I must have noticed, for she leaned over and said to me in a quick, anxious way:

"Martha must get home. She is quite worn out. She is not used to going about at night. Help me to get her home at once."

"Let's get the horses, Steve," I said, jumping up. "Rachel is tired of this," which I knew was the truth.

By the time we got to the wagon Martha was quiet. I do not know what Rachel had said to her, but I suppose she must have spoken with much firmness and authority to effect such a speedy change. She herself sat on the back seat beside Martha, and the chattering Arabel and I sat on the middle one.

I have ever disliked loquacious women, and I think perhaps Arabel may have given me a prejudice against the whole class. This seems unreasonable, for she was not a really silly girl. Now and then she had something sensible to say; but, unfortunately, she did not defer speech until those rare occasions. Moreover, she had a habit of giggling between every two sentences, and the less humor there was in her tongue the more inevitable became the giggle.

To-night she was at her worst. She mimicked the exhorters whom we had just heard, and so badly that I was only less ashamed of the badness of the performance than of the irreverence of the performer. She shrieked with merriment over the idea that Jack Dasher had "got religion," and made out a long, imaginary story about how Jack would come to the next dance without a cravat, and line out a hymn for the edification of his old comrades.

"And did you see Martha?" she suddenly broke out. "I thought she was going to 'get it,' sure. Wouldn't it have been great fun to see Martha shouting and carrying

on down there at the mourner's bench, and to hear Wesley Wyatt praying out loud about her sins?"

Rachel flashed a warning look at Arabel, who had turned about to face the two girls. But before her sister could speak, little Martha was sitting bolt upright. Her eyelids were red from weeping, but the eyes beneath were strangely bright.

"How can you make fun of people when they are so in earnest?" she asked. "There is something terrible in their earnestness. It makes me want to—to be good."

"Hush!" said Rachel, almost sternly. "Don't talk about that now, Martha. It is all new to you, and you have had your nerves played upon. To-morrow you will see the folly of it all. Makes you want to be good, indeed! You talk as if you had committed murder or highway robbery."

"I am *not* good," broke out Martha, impetuously. "Those people who talk about 'forgiveness' and 'free grace' speak a language that I don't understand. It is something beyond me."

Rachel's face seemed to grow older and harder. "You are talking the merest foolishness," she said. "What reason is there in such wild rantings as we have heard to-night? No wonder you say those people speak a language you can not understand. No rational being could understand them. Their appeal is not to the mind, but to the nerves. They excite weak natures, and to what end? Wesley Wyatt is a fine example. They make them the victims of wild delusions for awhile, and then leave them weaker and more miserable than they found them."

Stephen swung around from the high seat in front. "Don't lay anything up against Wesley," he said; "I'll have a quiet settlement with him."

"But he meant it for Stephen's good, didn't he?" Martha asked, trembling with eagerness. "Why should he pray, only for Stephen's good?"

"For his own pleasure, may be," said Stephen, rather grimly. I was surprised to see how keenly he had been cut.

Martha said no more, but Rachel roused herself to talk in a spirited way about other things.

Stephen asked her if she would not attend the meetings of our debating school, which would reopen in September. He and I had taken great interest in the debates of the previous winter, and looked forward with eagerness to a renewal of these intellectual tournaments.

"I shall not be here," Rachel told him.

"Not be here?" Stephen and Ross Turner spoke together.

"I am going East to school. I have wanted to go for a long time, and at last mother feels that she can spare me. I shall be near her relatives, and spend my vacations with them."

"And how long will you be gone?" asked Stephen.

"Two years."

"Two years!" This echo of Rachel's words came from all of us. "The East" was a long, weary stage journey away, and two years seemed to our impatient young hearts like two eternities.

"How I wish I was going with you," broke in the voluble Arabel. "I suppose you will have a lot of new frocks. And you will never come home, you know, because you'll pick up a nice beau back East and get married."

I had thought of the same thing. And even if Rachel did not marry some polished man while in the East, how would we backwoodsmen look to her upon her return? For the first time there came to me the longing with

which I grew very familiar, to go out and try what I, too, might learn in the great world.

"I shall come back," said Rachel. "Martha must have her turn."

It seemed unnatural to think of Martha as going away to acquire accomplishments, and I did not think she would ever take her turn.

"I suppose you'll learn a whole lot of things," Arabel ventured—"drawing and French and all. Good land! how I'd like to get away from here and see something of the world. Betsy Putnam had seven offers while she was in Albany last winter."

Rachel's nose tilted. "I'm not going for the sake of getting offers," she said. "I want to know something and do something."

"I think you know a good deal already," put in Martha. "And you can do a lot of things."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST SORROW.

It was nearly three years after this that I saw Rachel Sylvestre again. I chanced to be away working in the woods at some distance from my home when she left for New York State, and she did not return to Ohio for her vacations. I heard of her occasionally through Martha, but postage was expensive and mails uncertain, and an absence from home meant a more complete separation than it does now.

About twice each year Rachel wrote to Stephen, and her letters, which were read aloud in the family, I regarded as marvels of literary skill. Sometimes Maude Arrondale, mother of Sylvestre Arrondale the Third, writes me a note in angular characters and abounding in adjectives, and I smile to think what the lively Maude would have thought of the Addisonian composition of this maiden of the olden time. Yet, though I may be partial to my own generation, I do not believe Rachel's letters would suffer in the comparison. She was ignorant of much that is taught in the schools to-day, but she was what people in my time called "serious-minded," and was not altogether devoid of reasoning power.

I have searched much among Stephen's papers for these letters, and have found only one. I think it was the last he received during her absence. I will copy it down here, that the Rachels and Marthas of to-day may know what a school-girl's letter was like in my time. It may be I should say that Rachel's conversation was ever far more lively than her letters. These showed more of the precise habits

to which she was trained than they did of the quality of her own mind.

I omit a few passages relating to the events of school life and to characters with which this history has nothing to do:

ESTEEMED FRIEND:—

Some months have been allowed to elapse since your letter came to hand. During this time I have continued to pursue my studies, though my *diligence* has not, I feel sure, been all that my teachers could desire. Now that my school life is drawing to a close, I could wish that I had profited more fully by the instructions I have received, and that I had *retained* much that I find has been forgotten.

* * * * *

I trust the good health of your family continues. My own is excellent. I hear people speak of being "*thankful for good health.*" I have never learned this pious formula, but I am not sure but I could use it with some truth. I am, I trust, thankful for the *inheritance* of a sound constitution, although it is a debt to *my ancestors* and can not well be paid. Perhaps this is as *good* a kind of thankfulness as the other.

* * * * *

As the day for my return draws near, I begin to reflect much concerning the future. I fear that, with the stimulus of *daily instruction* removed, I shall soon cease from the habit of study, and become that which I most abhor, an *idle-minded* woman. I say I *abhor* such a woman, and indeed I do. In my own home I saw a life for my sex *circumscribed* indeed, but with certain *intentions* and *impulses* which saved it from the petty *monotony* which obtains in older communities. Pioneer women, like your mother and mine, must of necessity be spinners and weavers, must brew yeast and boil soap and perform other homely duties day by day. Yet in a certain sense they share with their husbands in the work of making homes in the wilderness, and felt the power of purpose in life not un-

worthy of them. But I confess that, since I came East, I have often been disgusted by the *gossip* and *tittle-tattle* with which the women here fill up their lives. The more I see the more I am convinced that the so-called "education" of women is *artificial* and *unsatisfactory*. The mind is not *trained* to cope with real *problems* and *difficulties* of life. I can not see why the education of women should not be *essentially the same* as that of men, in order that they may be trained to *reason* correctly and *inform* themselves concerning the great questions and events of the day.

My aunt, with whom I have been living, is a woman of *much more* than ordinary intelligence, and we have frequently discussed this matter, without, however, arriving at any *satisfactory conclusion*. I trust that, when I return home, my sister can come here and study with more *profit* than I have done.

* * * * *

Please give my respects to your parents and to all *enquiring friends*. I hope to see them all *soon*.

With apologies for so *hasty* and *poorly composed* a letter, I remain,

Your friend to command,
RACHEL SYLVESTRE.

Rachel's return to her home was hastened by a sad event—one which proved to have a lasting effect upon us all. Her mother died of pneumonia, after an illness of only a few days. It was a bitterly cold spring and there was much sickness. My father, like many others, was afflicted with a hard cold and severe pains in his chest. Our good mother, always easily alarmed when any one of us was ailing, wanted to call a doctor, but my father objected, as old Doctor Ware lived six miles away, and was none too well pleased when called to take this long ride without good reason.

But that very afternoon Dr. Ware came riding by, and Stephen called him to come in.

"On my way back," he answered, and we knew from the way he drove down the hill that he was anxious. He did call on his way back, and then it was that we learned of Mrs. Sylvestre's illness. The doctor had been called the night before, just at midnight, and had ridden through the dark and cold in response to the urgent summons. He had found her in great pain and much distressed for breath.

"Bad case," he said; and we knew from the way he sighed that he had little hope.

My mother waited only long enough to be told that father's condition was not serious, and then she had Stephen bring out the horses and take her to Squire Sylvestre's. She did not return that night, but that did not surprise us. Mother was the favorite nurse of all the families for miles around, and turned out cheerfully at all hours of the day or night to render service. In this day of the trained nurse there is comparatively little need of such homely ministries. No doubt the new order is better, but the world misses knowing what heroic sacrifice women of my mother's type are capable of. She had left Stephen and me many charges concerning father, who, now the doctor had treated his case so lightly, was determined to be at his work as usual. It was only when all the morning chores were done, therefore, that I ventured to leave him and go to inquire concerning Mrs. Sylvestre.

I knocked at the door of the great kitchen, and Martha let me in. Her eyes were red with weeping, and I felt more sorry for her than I had ever before felt for any one.

"Is she so bad?" I whispered, sitting down beside Martha on the wide settee.

The girl nodded. "I heard her talking to father a little while ago," she said. "She could speak only a few words at a time, but she said there were some things she

must tell him. Your mother and I were both in the room, so there was no secret about it. She wanted him to give her love to Rachel, and tell her to be a good daughter and sister, and try to fill her mother's place. Then she said the strangest thing. She said she knew now she had not been as brave as a woman should be. 'You will not blame me for saying so now, father,' she said. 'I have tried to be a good wife, and you will not blame me for saying this now, when I am going to die.' Father tried to quiet her, and told her she was not going to die. 'Yes, I am,' she said: 'and the future is dark. I have tried to be a good wife, and I have let go of everything else. I haven't been a brave woman. But I want you to do one thing, father. I want you to send for a Presbyterian minister, and let me be buried as my mother was.' He told her she was getting excited and mustn't talk any more, and indeed she was so tired that she had to rest. Father sat by the bed a long time, looking oh! so strange and frightened, like—like a man who has been found out in something. You know my mother was brought up to pray and go to church, but father persuaded her to give it up. And now I am sure she is sorry. Oh, Joseph, don't you believe there is a God, and a heaven where good people go? My mother says if there is a heaven, it is only for the elect, but I am sure that those who try to be good must go there. Don't you think so, Joseph?"

As I think I have said before, I was not what is called a religious boy; but when Martha appealed to me in this way I could think of nothing but my own dear mother's beautiful life, and the feeling I had that the God she loved must be a real person, who would keep her and take care of her. Boys of twenty are seldom infidels—especially boys with mothers like mine. So I answered quickly:

"Yes, indeed I do."

Mother came out and asked how father was, and when I told her that he seemed better, she said she would stay on through the day with Mrs. Sylvestre. Then she bade me be sure that the milk-pails were kept clean and that father did not expose himself, and hurried back to the sick-room.

At midnight Mrs. Sylvestre died. My mother, who was still with her, said she was unconscious for several hours before the end came, but opened her eyes in one bright look of recognition just at the last.

My first thought when the news came was for Rachel. In this day of the railroad and telegraph, the terrors of death are somewhat softened. Its chamber becomes a place of reunion for those who love each other and who find themselves dawn nearer together than ever before by the bond of a common grief. Each carries away a perfect memory of the dead, to be kept perfect through all the after years. Our memories of the living face become in time confused and interchanged, but our memory of the features in death remain, in its strange beauty and dignity and mystery, until the end.

But at the time of which I write separations were inexorable. Distance had no bridge, save that of a hopeless longing, that but made it seem the greater.

I did not know whether or not Colonel Sylvestre would have respected his wife's wishes had they been known only to himself. As my mother and Martha had heard what she said, there was really no way for him to avoid sending for the minister without showing himself to them as quite heartless; and Squire Sylvestre was not an altogether heartless man. So Stephen drove over to Cordingville, twelve miles away, and brought Parson Ellsworth to preach the funeral. I judge, looking back now upon the occasion, that the sermon was a rather tedious theological disserta-

tion, containing little either of comfort or of instruction in duty for the living. But I was glad the poor woman, who had so seldom had her wish in life, had been allowed to have it in death.

As soon as the slow-going message could reach her, and she could respond to it, Rachel was back in the old home. She was very sad, but she was one of the women whom sadness becomes. In her lively moods I confess I did not altogether like her; for no young fellow of twenty altogether likes a girl whose tongue is nimbler than his own. But now, with her beauty and the accomplishments she had gained in these last years chastened by her sorrow, I was drawn to her as never before.

But, though she was brilliant and more accomplished, she was neither so beautiful nor so winsome as Martha. All who knew the two agreed in this.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "CAMPBELLITES."

The years which had made an accomplished and dignified young woman out of Rachel had been busy with our Stephen as well. You young people of to-day no doubt look upon us old fellows as an illiterate lot, but for his day Stephen was a well-educated man. Indeed, I would be inclined to say that he was an educated man for any day, in whatever goes to make the real value of education.

He worked in the fields and in the woods with a skill beyond any of his fellows, developing such muscles as would have made him a hero in what they nowadays call "athletics." At the same time, he studied all the books he could lay his hands upon, and studied them to good purpose. Many a night I have wakened from sleep to find my brother sitting by the window of our little bedroom, picking out Latin or history by the light of the moon; and what he got in this hard way stayed with him. We were all proud when Sylvestre Arrondale the Second carried off the first honors at one of the great Eastern universities. but I think Stephen had a grip on the fundamentals of an education quite beyond that of our honor man. But this is merely my opinion, and it may be shaded by my partiality. This much I will say, though, that Sylvestre Arrondale the Second, with his mother and sisters to applaud him and his father to write checks for him, never worked for his education as Stephen Arrondale worked for his. (I want to say right here, though, that Sylvestre Arrondale is the finest fellow of his generation, and that he married

the sweetest woman who has been born into the world since the women of whom I am writing now!)

I was myself a gangling youth, with great feet and an ever-present tendency to fall over them. The presence of women was, until much later than the time of which I write, a source of great embarrassment to me. But Stephen had a natural courtliness, due, I think, to the fact that he thought little about himself, and was ever solicitous for the comfort of those about him. He had none of the obtrusive gallantry which was affected by the would-be beaux of the neighborhood; but women, old and young, naturally turned to him for help, and he gave it freely.

After Rachel's return, we fell into the habit of spending many of our evenings together at the Sylvestre home. Rachel was able to help us younger ones with our studies, and she and Stephen read or studied together. After our more serious work was done, we ended each evening with an hour of pleasure, spent over the works of Shakespeare or Scott. I never hear the steady patter of rain on the roof but it brings back that rainy week in November when we read "The Merchant of Venice" together; and my Portia is always slender and graceful and looks like Rachel Sylvestre.

These happy times had gone on, I think, for nearly a year, when one day Stephen surprised and grieved us by the announcement that he was going to leave home for an absence of several months.

"I have never been away, you know," he told me. "Home is the best place in the world, but there are some lessons that can't be learned there. I will go for a little while, and then come back and give you a turn at it."

It seemed strange to me that he should be in such a hurry to go, when he had never even mentioned the matter before, and I could not help connecting his plan with

Rachel. This I was still more inclined to do when he went away without going over to the Sylvestres to say good-by. I remembered that, on the Sunday night before he announced his intention, he had been there without me; and I easily argued that Rachel might have said something to wound him. She had seemed more gentle since her mother's death than in the old days, yet I was never quite able to shake off my childish notion that she felt above us.

Stephen went to the little town of Rocksford, twenty miles away, where an old neighbor of ours had bought a mill. Mr. Osburn knew Stephen's skill and faithfulness, and readily promised him employment. I shall never forget the morning he went away. My mother looked in his saddle-bags again and again, to make sure that he had plenty of linen; and as often as she looked the tears started into her eyes, for Stephen's going made the first break in our happy home life. Even father was dispirited, and it needed Stephen's constant effort at cheerfulness to keep us up.

"Why, mother," he said, "one would suppose I was going to Indiana or Missouri, by the way you take it. It is only a little ride to Rocksford, and I will be coming home often."

I remember this remark of Stephen's, because the words "Indiana" and "Missouri" gave me such a chill. I thought how terrible it would be if he should really go so far away. Sylvestre Arrondale the Second, who runs across to Europe every summer for a vacation trip, will laugh at our idea of distances; but that was before man's invention annihilated space.

I can see Stephen at this minute, as he rode down the lane on his roan mare Kitty. I turned away from the open door and put my arm about my mother, and she gave a little sob as she said, "You must be my big son

now, Joseph." And I think I really stepped into manhood all at once, as I answered:

"I'll try it, mother."

For awhile I was shy of the Sylvestres, resenting any possible ill-treatment which Stephen might have had at their hands. As I think I have said before, the Sylvestre girls seldom attended the small merry-makings of the neighborhood, and it was some time before I was thrown with them again. I think it was my innate stubbornness that finally led me to resume the old relations.

It happened thus: A Universalist preacher, a man of some natural ability and of quite wide reading for his day, was preaching at the center of the next township, and one Sunday afternoon I took a notion to ride over and hear him. The name "Universalist" meant nothing to me, but I was always anxious to see and hear any one who came from the great outside world of which I dreamed.

It is not of the sermon I heard that I started out to tell; yet it may be worth while to say that it impressed me far more than I had been impressed by any preaching I had heard up to that time. Mr. Vincent, the preacher, was Eastern bred, quoted poetry at great length, and was not without skill in reasoning. The reasoning was directed, I must say, more against the doctrines of others than in proof of his own. Perhaps I liked it the better for this, for I was still enough of a boy to love a debate. At any rate, it pleased me to hear the arguments against a "limited atonement" put into such graceful forms. I had been accustomed from childhood to hearing these arguments stated less elegantly, in the discussions between my father and my mother, and had been half unconsciously convinced by them. In truth, the Universalism of that day was not so much a formal system as it was a protest against the

Calvinism of the time, and as such it naturally found many sympathizers.

What I started to say about the service that day was, that I was greatly surprised to see Colonel Sylvestre and Rachel there. Their presence was explained when, after the service, they greeted me cordially and introduced me to their guest, the Reverend Cady Vincent, of Albany.

I learned afterward that Rachel and Mr. Vincent had met during one of her school vacations, at the home of her aunt, and had discovered that their fathers had been friends in boyhood. On such a foundation a friendship was easily established, especially as the two young people had many tastes in common. They met several times afterward, and had exchanged occasional letters since Rachel's return. It struck me as singular that Rachel had never mentioned to me so close a friendship; I was almost certain that Stephen knew nothing about it, unless he had learned it on that last Sunday night. I began to wonder if this girl, whom I had always accused, in my own mind, of being cold-hearted, was in love with the elegant young clergyman.

This suspicion aroused me. I would not admit that the Arrondales could be so easily set aside for flowery English and fine broadcloth. To my own surprise, I accepted the Colonel's invitation to ride home with him. I determined to forget my big feet, and to be master of the occasion. And I rather think I succeeded.

Rachel and Mr. Vincent rode on before us. Rachel was mounted on a spirited black horse, and I had never seen her slender figure show to better advantage. She was an accomplished horsewoman, and, when she put her animal on his mettle, Mr. Vincent, who rode a soberer nag, had enough to do to keep up with her. I fancy that her wit outrode his as well at times, for sometimes he looked vexed

at her quick replies, and seemed to have no words ready.

I stopped with the party at the Sylvestre home, and partook gratefully of the good things set forth by Martha's willing hands.

Perhaps I might have withdrawn after a short stay, but to my disgust Ross Turner came driving up, and proceeded to make himself at home before the big open fire. He addressed himself more particularly to Martha, while Mr. Vincent continued to monopolize Rachel. Once more I decided that the Arrondales should not be put aside so easily, and settled myself down to spend the evening.

Ross had lost none of his offensiveness since the old days. He and the loquacious Arabel Holcomb were supposed to be lovers; yet ever after one of their frequent quarrels he returned to his old admiration for Rachel, who snubbed him as systematically as if she had been paid a regular salary for the service.

Evidently he found Martha more kind. They had chatted together for some time, when Ross suddenly leaned over and addressed Mr. Vincent.

"Say, I didn't tell you I saw Steve, did I?"

"No; where did you see him?"

"Over to Rocksford. Getting me a buggy made over there. Going to have the best turnout around here when it's done. Yes, took dinner at Osburn's, and had a good visit with Steve. Know he'd joined the Campbellites?"

"The *what*?" I demanded.

"The Campbellites. New kind of religion. Got lots of it around Rocksford. Locked 'em out of the churches, and they went to the schoolhouse. Locked 'em out of the schoolhouse, and they took to preaching in the woods. Queer lot, and all the folks around there are down on 'em. Funny, Steve should take up with them, ain't it?"

There was no need that I should answer, for Colonel Sylvestre was ready with a word of cutting comment.

“One would suppose,” he said, “that the old forms of religious insanity were quite enough. But it seems necessary that new forms should be developed year by year.”

Perhaps the Reverend Cady Vincent did not relish having his own beliefs characterized as “insanity.” But evidently he did not care to enter into a controversy with his host, and thought it wiser to vent his annoyance on an absent adversary.

“These Campbellites have a very pernicious influence, I am told,” he said. “I have never met any of them, but I have been told a great many strange things concerning their teaching. In many cases they have broken up churches, and even swept preachers and church officers into the current of their belief.”

“In short,” said Colonel Sylvestre, with a rather unpleasant smile, “they are doing exactly what you are yourself trying to do.”

Mr. Vincent laughed good naturedly. “Well,” he said, “I admit that we Universalists are still considered too heretical to be respected as heresy-hunters. But the other fellow’s heterodoxy is always dangerous, is it not, Miss Sylvestre?”

Rachel turned, and, as she did so, I caught her look of scorn, and saw how utterly Stephen had abased himself in her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LETTER FROM STEPHEN.

The next day, Stephen's letter came. It is a document which has had an important bearing upon many lives, and which has been kept carefully for more than fifty years. I am glad I can copy it here, for I feel that it will enable you to know Stephen better than you could possibly know him through any description of mine.

ROCKSFORD, OHIO, May 14, 183—.

MY BELOVED PARENTS:—I have delayed writing, hoping that I might have an opportunity to go home and have a long talk with you concerning the things that are on my heart. But Mr. Osburn can not well spare me just now, and certainly it would be a poor return for all his kindness if I should leave him at the time when my services are most needed.

It may surprise you somewhat to learn that I have recently made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of Góð, and have been immersed upon that profession. I have been led to this step first by the Christian example of you, my ever dear mother, and more immediately by the teachings of the people known as Christians, or disciples of Christ.

Concerning these people you may be still uninformed, as I was until a few weeks ago. Undoubtedly you have heard that they are baptizing thousands of persons in this part of the country; but if you have learned of them hitherto only through their enemies, you may be glad to know the little I can tell you concerning their real spirit and purposes.

The movement which they represent is simply an effort to return to the faith and the practice of New Testament Christianity. It originated with Thomas Campbell,

a very devout Scotch Presbyterian minister, who came to this country in 1807. He was greatly distressed in mind over the divided condition of Protestantism, and the consequent confusion of the people concerning the claims of Christ upon the soul. A little later he was joined in his work by his son Alexander, who, during his separation from his father, had been pursuing a train of thought remarkably similar to that followed by the elder Campbell. They joined heart and mind in their studies, avowing their determination to accept no doctrine as authoritative save such as are taught in the New Testament itself. They further declared that whatever teaching they found in the New Testament they would follow whithersoever it might lead them.

I do not know how it may look to you; but to me one of the most wonderful things I have ever known is the thought of these two brave men starting out alone to blaze their way through the forest of mystery and superstition, that they might come to a plain knowledge of God's word. They were bound to the past by many tender ties, but they were willing to relinquish all in order to learn and do the will of the Lord more perfectly. In our simple frontier life examples of remarkable physical courage are not wanting; but in my limited experience I have found the courage of conviction much more uncommon; and there is no trait that I so greatly admire and respect.

Their investigations led them much further than they anticipated from the teachings of their past. As you, dear mother, can readily see, they found that the baptism of infants was without warrant in the Scriptures, and must be relinquished. It then became necessary for them to seek Scriptural baptism, which they found could be nothing else than immersion. Thus they went on, step by step, until they found themselves very far indeed from the teaching of their fathers, but rejoicing with joy unspeakable as they discovered the exceeding simplicity and reasonableness of God's requirements. They had been joined from time to time by other and likeminded students of God's word; and as their position became known it was evident that many persons in different parts of the coun-

try, having grown weary of the burdens put upon them by the religious systems of the day, were eager for a plain statement of God's will for them.

And now, my dear parents, I must go back and tell you my own story. I suppose you know but little of it, for Joseph has ever accused me of being over-close-mouthed where my private affairs are concerned.

The Bible has been to me from childhood a source of much pleasure. I remember well, my mother, how Joseph and I sat at your knee on Sunday afternoon, and heard you read the wonderful stories of the Old Testament and the beautiful lessons of the New. When you gave us passages to commit to memory, I learned to delight in the words, even though I scarcely comprehended anything of the thoughts contained therein. As I grew to manhood, I began to be concerned for the salvation of my soul. I knew that I was not fit to live or ready to die. I listened to the religious teachers who came into my way, but it was not long until I became hopelessly bewildered. I could not reconcile this teaching with my idea of God, as drawn from the Bible itself. There he is represented as infinitely loving, longing for the salvation of his human creatures, and sending his Son into the world to make that salvation possible. It seemed to me preposterous that men should think it necessary to implore and importune him to save them. I do not know how it was that I came to have such faith in my own knowledge, but I grew more and more settled in my conviction that the teachers of the day misunderstood and misinterpreted the word of God.

I confess that, as I grew older, doubts often obtruded themselves. I asked myself why, if the Bible really were divine, it could be so easily misinterpreted. At times the great truths of the incarnation and the resurrection staggered me. Because they were too much for my intelligence, I thought they were too much for my faith. I remember that one June night, after a hard day in the hay-field, I walked out and threw myself down on the new-cut grass. In a moment I was asleep, and when I awoke it was late and the stars were out. The thought came to me that our world was only one in a universe of worlds. Were

those others, like our own world, written over with the record of human struggle and passion? Were they red-dened with crime and bloodshed? Had their inhabitants grieved a just God by their wayward acts? Then suddenly I sat up, thinking how small I was and how great God is. I said to myself that the Maker of this universe could not be mindful of me, a tiny atom of one of his far-off worlds. And I groaned aloud at the thought. Yet almost immediately came the thought, "He does care. He has said so. He would not have created me, to leave without the assurance of himself. God cares. I know he cares."

By degrees, however, I became quite hopeless about ever finding a solution for my difficulties. I attended revival meetings, and heard the converts tell of the wonderful experiences through which they had found the assurance that God had accepted them. But it was not emotional experiences for which I looked. These did indeed come to me, as on the night of which I have told you; but I knew they were the expressions of certain moods to which I have always been subject, and that they would soon pass away. Perhaps I could have told as good a story at the anxious-seat as many another, but my reason and my knowledge of God's word both told me that this was not the assurance that was needed. What I wanted was to *know*, not merely to feel something which I might cease to feel upon the morrow.

Joseph will remember a camp-meeting which we attended with a party of gay young folks three or four years ago. At that meeting Wesley Wyatt, in a spasm of what he supposed to be religious zeal, prayed for me by name. Of course, I was annoyed and for a time afterward I was inclined to stay away from religious meetings altogether. But at length I fell back into my old habits.

I had ceased to hope for any immediate answer to the question that oppressed my soul. But, little by little, I settled down to this conviction, that God, in the New Testament, had made plain to men the way of approach to him through his Son; and that, if I ever found any church or religious people teaching what he teaches there, I should

at once identify my life with such a movement. By this determination I have tried to live.

I had heard of the teaching of the Campbells and their coadjutors only in the most general way, and not once did it occur to me that their leading was toward that New Testament way for which I sought. Four weeks ago it was announced that Walter Scott would preach in the Baptist Church at Rocksford. Mr. Osburn informed me that this man was the close companion of Alexander Campbell, and a man of masterly powers. He had preached at the schoolhouse on the occasion of a former visit, and had been pressed to remain; but a previous appointment at the next town made this impossible. Now, by special invitation of Mr. Osburn—whose influence among his Baptist brethren you well know—he was to speak at the church.

Of course, I wished to hear this remarkable man, and for this purpose I went to the church long before the time appointed. The doors were closed, but a crowd had already gathered. Mr. Osburn came up presently, and, standing on the church steps, informed the people that the officers of the church had decided that Mr. Scott could not have the use of the meeting-house.

"But I have driven Mr. Scott to the schoolhouse," he said, "and I trust every one of you will go there to hear him. If any of my brethren ask of me a justification of my own course in this matter, I have only to cite to them the words of one of the olden time: 'If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye can not overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God.'"

At the moment I was somewhat surprised at the independence of Mr. Osburn's action; now it seems the most natural thing in the world.

The preaching of Walter Scott was a revelation to me. He is the first truly great man whom I have even known, and his is far more than mere intellectual greatness. It is intellectual greatness moved by overmastering convictions. He is a man of marked appearance, and speaks with a rich Scotch accent. So much I noted in the beginning.

But when he began to preach, the message drove from my mind all consciousness of the man who brought it.

His theme was "The Messiahship of Christ," and, as he spoke, Jesus of Nazareth lived again, first as he lived in the minds of patriarch and prophet, and then as he lived among men in the fulfillment of promise and prophecy. The Bible became to me a new Book. It was no longer a bundle of fragments. With Christ as the center, I could clearly see how the several parts had a vital relation to one another.

In closing his sermon, the speaker made an appeal that seemed to be intended expressly for me. He spoke of the many who were waiting for a clearer knowledge of the way of salvation, and ready and anxious to follow it when it should be known.

"Men and brethren," he said, "Jesus the Christ is of supreme authority on earth and in heaven. No man, living or dead, has the right to bind that which he has left free. Who will accept the terms of salvation which he has laid down? Who of you will cast aside human creeds and confessions, and build upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone?"

It seemed to me that my whole life passed in review before my mind in the next five minutes. Here, beyond doubt, was the conception of the New Testament church, with Christ in his place of supreme authority. Here were the people with whom I had promised to identify myself. My heart bounded at the thought. My dream had indeed come true. I scarcely knew which feeling had the better of me—my unworthiness or my great joy.

My first impulse was to respond at once to the preacher's invitation. But you know you have always named me your cautious son. I had been many times disappointed, and my happiness seemed too good to accept without question. I heard the preacher bidding those present to give him their hands and God their hearts; I saw a dozen persons press forward in answer to the invitation, and yet I held back, still questioning my happiness.

We went at once to the river, and when I saw those who had just confessed Christ go forward in baptism, I could no longer wait, but made my way to the water's edge, gave my confession, and was immediately baptized.

There you have my story. It is a long one, and I fear you must have wearied in the reading. Mr. Scott remained for nearly two weeks. About forty persons were baptized, and a score more came out from among the denominations to take their stand upon the Bible alone. Among these last were my kind friends, Mr. and Mrs. Osburn. The schoolhouse has been closed against us, but we met regularly every week in the Osburn home for the breaking of bread and prayers.

I expect to pay you a visit in the near future, and to explain all these things more fully. Until such time as I can see you, I remain

Your obedient son, STEPHEN ARRONDALE.

Father read this letter aloud, and, long before he was done, my mother was in tears. "It's a good letter," she said. "But I wish Stephen were a Baptist."

Father said nothing. I remember thinking afterward how strange it was that he did not even tease mother.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE RIVER-BANK.

Mr. Cady Vincent had gone from Colonel Sylvestre's when next I went there. Rachel said nothing about his visit, but the Colonel spoke of him as a cultured gentleman, whose friendship he highly valued.

"As for his religious belief," he said, with something like a sneer, "there is not enough of that to harm anybody."

Rachel seemed annoyed at having the subject brought up, and quickly changed it. "Did you know that Martha is leaving us?" she asked. The sisters were sitting side by side, and as she spoke the elder smoothed the hand of the other affectionately. Rachel was at times a trifle sharp-spoken with others, but she was ever most tender and gentle with Martha.

"I am going to school at Rocksford," Martha explained. "Rachel was for having me go East, but that would take me too far away from her and father. There is a very good select school at Rocksford—so Mrs. Osburn has written to Rachel—and I can be spared to go there for a few months."

I started to say that at Rocksford she would be near Stephen—a prospect which naturally presented itself to me as the most inviting in the world—but I remembered that Stephen was now a "Campbellite," and held my peace, for I had a strong impression that, as a "Campbellite," Stephen would have less favor in Rachel's eyes than he had had hitherto.

“Rachel is so much wiser than I am that I am greatly ashamed of myself,” Martha went on, with her arch little smile. She seldom laughed aloud, but this smile was a beautiful thing to see. “And when I try to take lessons of her, she becomes so strict that I am terribly afraid.”

“Martha has never been away from home,” said Rachel, patting the small, white hand again. Rachel’s own hands were long and slim, and had in their every movement a strange sort of eloquence which I know not how to describe. “There is not much of the world to be known in Rocksford, but she will at least learn how people live outside of Blue Brook Township. Mrs. Osburn has kindly offered to receive her into her home, and to have a care over her.”

I wondered if Rachel knew that Stephen lived at the Osburns’. Probably she did not, for, so far as I could judge, there was no interchange of letters between her and my brother.

The next week Martha went away. The Saturday night following, I distinctly remember, we looked for Stephen to come home for his long-promised visit. My mother, usually calm and sensible under all conditions, was fairly nervous with anxiety. She baked the pound cake of which Stephen was particularly fond, put the house in perfect order, and then walked down the lane again and again to look for him. Even father manifested some slight restlessness, and came into the kitchen again and again to look at the clock.

But darkness settled down, and Stephen did not come. We sat up later than usual, and when father rose to wind the clock, I saw there was a look of real distress on his face.

It is strange how plainly I remember these details, and I think it goes to show how keen was the disappointment which has stayed with me so long. One little incident stands

out more clearly than all the rest. We were an undemonstrative family, and Stephen and I, since we had grown to manhood, kissed our mother only when we were leaving home, or on our return. But to-night her wishful, worried face gave me an impulse which I could not have explained, and I crossed the room, after I had taken my bedroom candle, passed my free arm about her, and kissed her tenderly.

"I am so afraid something has happened to Stephen," she said.

"Nothing can have happened to Stephen," I said. But spite of myself I was a little uneasy.

"He sent word that he would be here," she said. "You know how careful he always is to keep a promise."

"Something has happened at the last moment to hinder him," I told her.

"I don't know how I can bear the suspense until I hear from him," she said, speaking low, so that father would not hear.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, mother; I'll ride over to Rocksford in the morning and see Stephen."

"To-morrow is Sunday," she reminded me.

"What of that? Could I make any better use of the day than to see my brother and allay your anxiety? I will start early, and, if you say so, I will go to church in Rocksford."

"I am not sure that it would be right." And my mother looked perplexed enough, for her Puritan conscience was pulling in one direction and her anxiety for her boy in the other.

But her anxiety conquered, and the next morning I set off before daybreak. It was early November, and the woods were turning brown. Winter still seemed a long way off, however, for the air was warm for the season. I

did not like to contemplate the prospect of a winter with Stephen away. It was our first separation, and it went very hard with me. Not only would I miss his company at home, but with him and Martha away, the pleasant times in the Sylvestre home would be of the past. I confessed to myself that I would enjoy an occasional tilt of wits with Rachel, but I did not care to risk an encounter in which I was pretty sure to come out second.

The road to Rocksford was a familiar one, for I had often gone there with my father to purchase articles which could not be obtained at our village store. My thoughts were good companions that morning, and, as the clear air and the calm judgment of the morning hour had practically taken away my anxiety, I greatly enjoyed the ride. I felt confident that I should find Stephen safe and well; and I was conscious of a little curiosity as to whether or not I should get a glimpse of Martha.

In my enjoyment I had forgotten to hasten my journey, and the morning was well advanced when I found myself nearing my destination. According to my recollection, there was a small stream to be crossed just before Mr. Osburn's mill and dwelling were reached. A sudden turn in the road brought me to this stream. And there I saw a sight which lives in my memory as if I had seen it yesterday.

On the bank around a gentle curve in the stream were assembled forty or fifty persons, all of them with earnest, serious faces; and midway of the stream, standing waist-deep in it, were two persons. One was a young man of about my own age, whom I had never seen before. The other, who stood with one arm about the youth and the other upraised to heaven, was Stephen.

In a moment, I knew what was transpiring. Frequently I had gone with my mother to see persons bap-

tized in Blue Brook, near our home. Indeed, the sacred ceremony had always had a peculiar fascination for me—chiefly, I think, because it appealed to my boyish sense of poetry. But to see it administered by my own brother, at a time and place like this, gave me a feeling that none but unexpected events could evermore come to pass in this world.

I could not hear the solemn words of dedication, but I clearly caught the familiar song which burst from the little company on the bank:

“O, happy are they
Who their Saviour obey,
And have laid up their treasures above;
Tongue cannot express
The sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love.”

The young man who had just been baptized was received by the persons on the bank with hearty hand-clasps. Stephen raised his hand again for a moment, as if in prayer, and then the little company broke up.

My first impulse was to slip away unnoticed, and appear at Mr. Osburn's house later. I can not account for this impulse even now. I think it was a kind of feeling that I did not want to be responsible in any way for Stephen's being a “Campbellite.”

But I had already been seen. Martha came toward me, and shyly held out her hand. I slipped from my horse and returned the greeting.

“Is anything wrong at home?” she asked. “I was just a little frightened, when I saw you.”

“No, all at home are well. I came because we expected Stephen last night and mother was distressed because he did not come.”

“He was so sorry! But just as he was ready to start Mr. Osburn came home, and told him that a young man was coming from the next town this morning to be baptized. Stephen had never baptized any one before, but he speaks and prays in the meetings every week, and the people love to hear him. So he could not refuse to do this, though he was very sorry to make his mother anxious.”

“I should think the young man could have waited until a regular minister came around,” I said.

Martha’s cheeks reddened. “It is not a thing which can safely be allowed to wait,” she said, “though I have waited and am waiting.” She paused a moment, and smoothed my horse’s mane with her little white hand. Then she turned her clear eyes up to mine. “If I could be baptized this morning,” she said, “I should be the happiest woman in all the world.”

My mind caught at the word “woman.” Was little Martha really a woman? I had always thought of her as a little girl.

“Why are you not baptized, then, if you care so much about it?” I asked.

She turned her eyes away, but not soon enough to hide their look of pain. “I have always been taught to obey my father,” she said. “Sometimes I think I will not wait, and then again I think I must gain his consent, if possible.”

Stephen came up in a moment, eager and anxious. I explained to him how I chanced to be there, and then I went with him and Martha to Mr. Osburn’s home.

But all day long there was a constraint upon us three; for I felt that the others had thoughts into which I could not enter.

The thing which I noticed most was the change in Martha. She had been away from home less than two weeks, yet already she was greatly altered. It was not

merely that she seemed more womanly. There was about her a sense of harmony with her surroundings, such as I had never known in her before. The religious atmosphere of the Osburn home seemed to suit her perfectly. The conversation on Bible themes was an evident delight to her. She had suddenly become a radiant creature, whose pulses seemed to be bounding with life and joy.

I have since learned, through half a century's observation of human character, that there are in the world a few persons of what might be termed religious genius. The contemplation of religious subjects is to them what the contemplation of a sunset is to an artist, or the study of harmony to a musician. Their spiritual convictions come to them not by the slow processes of logic, but by impressions and intuitions that can not be analyzed.

To this class Martha belonged. I remember thinking in those days that her impressibility was due to the excess of femininity within her. Now I know it was due to the preponderance of the spiritual.

The next day after my return from Rocksford, I came upon Rachel in our kitchen. She had come over to consult my mother in some of her housewifely perplexities.

"I saw Martha over at Rocksford," I said.

"So your mother tells me," she answered. "I hope that Campbellite brother of yours won't undertake to convert our little one." She laughed, as if what she had suggested were the most unlikely thing in the world.

What could I say? I laughed feebly, and went on about my work.

After our visitor had gone away my mother said, "Rachel Sylvester is certainly the most capable girl I have ever known. Such an excellent housekeeper, and with such a head for books! It is a terrible pity that she is an unbeliever."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE.

In January Stephen came home with the intention of remaining at least for several months. He had been with us for a few hours on Thanksgiving Day, which was, in our home, a much greater festival than Christmas. The one thing that I recall distinctly about this hurried visit was that father requested Stephen to "ask a blessing" before we partook of our Thanksgiving dinner. This struck me as a kind of formal recognition of my brother's new position; and I fancied that my mother was much gratified that father had thought of such a thing.

My mother had not the nature of which sectarians are made, and she could not, under any circumstances, have had a sectarian feeling toward her boy. Martha was at home again, and had given us great accounts of the favor with which Stephen's public exhortations had been received in Rocksford. So it was not many days before mother said to him:

"Stephen, I wish I could hear you speak in public. There are many about us who need instruction, and you ought not to hide your light under a bushel."

"I am going to speak at the schoolhouse next Sunday," Stephen answered. "I have already posted the notice."

So it came about that Stephen preached the first sermon ever preached in Blue Brook Township by the so-called "Campbellites."

There was no limit to the excitement when it was known that young Steve Arrondale had turned "Campbellite," and that he had come back to preach in the log schoolhouse. Everybody was talking about it; and, as I was

judged a harmless sort of fellow, the talk went on in my presence without interruption.

Over at Skinner's store, everybody had a word to say.

"That boy come to set his elders right, eh?" asked old Zephaniah Leech, scraping out his pipe. "Wa'al, now, Steve's a good one at harvestin'; but I guess he'd better leave preachin' alone till his beard's growed."

"It's a sin an' a shame that as likely a boy as Stephen ever got took in with the Campbellites," says Deacon Meacham. "It'll be the ruination of him, an' I knowed that boy when he wasn't higher than a chair." Then the deacon gave a deep sigh, put his bundle of store sugar in his saddle-bags, and rode away with his head down, thinking, I suppose, of our Stephen's wasted life.

To tell the truth, I was thinking of the same thing. I had a boy's share of ambitions for myself, but I had far more than the ordinary brother's share of ambition for Stephen. I knew very well that I had no special gift for winning my way among men, but what I could not do by any sort of effort, I well knew that Stephen did without any effort at all. For him to lead others was as natural as for him to breathe. He was made that way. And, ignorant boy though I was, my own limitations taught me that such a gift brought great possibilities. In our little world, Stephen might, I knew, be a great man. It seemed to me that he had thrown away his chances.

As far as his new notions of religion were concerned, they seemed to me to be of the wildest. I had for myself no idea of doctrines, but I had a strong idea of respectability, and my general impression was that, to be a "Campbellite," or, as Steve said, to be a disciple, was not exactly respectable. I have learned since that no new teaching

is considered altogether respectable. Peter and Paul discovered the same thing.

The general feeling against Stephen's course did not hinder people from going out to hear him. Not more than half of those who came could be crowded inside the little schoolhouse. The rest stood outside the open windows and listened.

I wonder what a modern audience would think of that scene—the roughly chinked walls, the slab benches, the puncheon floors, and the few sputtering “dips,” scarcely giving light enough to make the darkness visible. I can see it all as if it were yesterday. Yes, more, I can see half a dozen of the faces I saw that night far more clearly than, with these dull old eyes, I see the dear young faces that are round about me as I write.

I had been of a dozen different minds about going to the schoolhouse that night. I did not want to hear Stephen preach the strange notions he had accepted. My mother had been nervous and anxious for days, and once she slipped her plump little hand into mine as she said, “I tremble for Stephen, Joseph. What if he should hesitate and stumble before all those people?”

But, somehow, I did not tremble for Stephen. I had never known him to undertake anything that he could not carry through. But I did not want to hear him. It seemed to me that it made me more conscious than ever of the change in his life, and of what had come between us.

But curiosity got the better of me, and I went. Rachel too, was there, drawn in spite of herself, I think, as I had been. I can see the hard look about her mouth and the proud set of her head. Little Martha sat beside her, very quiet, but, I thought, with an eager, hungry look in her eyes. The look went to my heart, though I little thought, that night, that those eyes held the secret of the future.

Steve's hand trembled a little, I thought, as he drew out his pocket Testament, but he did not show embarrassment in any other way. Indeed, I do not think he was embarrassed. People who are really in earnest get beyond that.

"Friends," he said, "this is a new way I have found since I left you. I am persuaded that it is the old way of the apostles and the early disciples. I know it is a way everywhere spoken against, but it is my purpose to walk in it. Who will go with me? Who is there, of these old friends and comrades, who will come forward here to give me his hand and God his heart, and walk in the good old way?"

I felt a queer tugging at my heart, and a longing to go forward and give my hand to my brother. In a moment, I was ashamed of this feeling, and told myself that it was no real desire, but a mere impulse, born of brotherly sympathy and the emotion of the moment. I had no idea that any one would respond to the invitation, and I was surprised at Stephen's look and tone of expectancy. The new doctrine might do in Valleyville, but it would never do among the shrewd Yankee folk of Blue Brook.

Then I noticed a little rustle in the crowd a little ahead of me. After the fashion of the time, the men sat on one side of the schoolhouse and the women on the other. I was on the back seat, not so much because I fancied the company of the rough boys who sat there, as because it seemed easier and less embarrassing to listen from that distance.

When I saw the stir, I was anxious for the moment, lest some one should be seeking to make a disturbance. Then I saw what had happened. My father had crowded into the aisle and was walking to the front.

Looking back upon it now, I know that moment marked a change in all of our lives. I think Stephen knew it then. As he came up the aisle to meet father, he had the look of a man whom God had blessed beyond his hopes.

Both were strong, self-contained men, but there were tears on the cheeks of both as they grasped each other's hands. As they reached the front, father turned and faced the people. Stephen motioned them to be seated.

"Friends and neighbors," said father (I had never known before how much he and Stephen were alike. Their voices, even, had the same firm tone), "I have lived among you all these years as a man who had no fear of God before his eyes. It has been my fault that you thought of me in this way, but it is not quite the truth. All my life long, and especially since I have had with me the example of my good wife, I have wanted to serve God. But there were many things in the creeds of those about me that I could not understand, and many more which I could not accept. I tried, I will tell you frankly, to be content as an unbeliever, but I could not be. I could not be rid of my feeling of accountability to a good God, who had created me and before whose judgment-seat I must at last appear. I knew that, if there were a God at all, he must be a God of reason and justice. He would not demand one thing of one person, and another of another. He would not ask all to follow him, and then close the way against any. But when I inquired of human guides, all was confusion and darkness. Neighbors, I wish to stand before you to-night for what I am. I can truly say,

**"This is the way I long have sought,
And mourned because I found it not."**

"Neighbors, I take no man for my guide, but I am willing to take the Scriptures for my teacher, and to fol-

low where they lead. I have come into the vineyard late, and for this I am sorry; but though it is at the eleventh hour, I bear you witness that I have come at the first call that I could feel sure was meant for me. Pray for me, that I may prove faithful."

All the time that father was talking, Stephen stood shaking with sobs, yet with happiness like that of an angel's upon his face. It seemed almost as if his joy were greater than he could bear.

When father had finished, Stephen said, "I am going to ask who else is ready to go with my dear and honored father."

I caught sight of poor little Martha. She had taken Rachel by the hand, and seemed begging her for something. It was not hard to guess what, for Rachel shook her head again and again, and the hard look seemed to set itself more firmly about the corners of her mouth.

So busy had I been in watching Rachel and Martha, that I had not noticed my mother. She had gone quietly forward, slipped one hand into my father's and given the other to Stephen.

My dear mother! An odd thing about her was, that when she was very happy, a look of girlishness came over her face, so that she looked many years younger than she was. So marked was it at this moment that one could scarcely have believed the tall preacher was her son.

Everybody respected my father, but in all the country round about, no other woman was loved as mother was. Her great great-grand-children can tell to-day stories that they have heard of her neighborly kindness and sympathy. Every woman in the house was in tears—every one, that is, except Rachel, whose face was as cold and stern as ever.

But after the service Stephen sought her out and spoke to her. It seemed that, in the joy and overflowing gratitude of his heart, he instinctively demanded the sympathy of his old friend.

“Will you not welcome me home, Rachel?” he asked.

“No,” she answered, coldly. “I do not welcome you to such work as you are doing now. I expected better things of *you*.”

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN'S HAND.

I suppose it would be quite out of the question to make persons of the present time understand what a stir was created on account of what my father and mother had done. It seems a simple enough matter now, but at that day it meant tearing at the roots of old prejudices and associations. These new people, who called themselves disciples, were deemed heretics of the first order, and that such staid and respectable people as my parents should consent to be allied with them, could not but cause the bitterest criticism. Wherever I went, I was met with questions concerning the new faith, most of which, I confess, I was quite unable to answer.

To tell the truth, I felt very sore over the affair. It seemed to me that my good parents had done a strange thing, and one quite out of keeping with their past lives. I thought that, if father had wished to make a profession of religion, it would have been much more seemly in him to join the Baptist Church with my mother than to take a course calculated to excite so much unfavorable comment. Of the doctrinal difficulties of which he had spoken I understood very little. Doctrines in those days meant next to nothing to me.

Stephen was with us all the time now, and I was bound to confess that our home was far happier than it had ever been before. Father read the New Testament as eagerly as Stephen and I had read Scott's novels the year before, and he and mother, instead of debating on Calvinism, as they had done in the old time, talked of the good new

time that had come, and of the way of salvation that now seemed so plain to both of them. Mother fully believed that all the world would see it as clearly as she did, and that all sectarianism would seem to be a thing of the past. But father was not so hopeful. "Human nature is human nature, Abbie," he used to say. "And some people have got it, as well as some mules. Stephen thinks the millennium is just a short piece before us, but there are a lot of sinners like me to be converted before we get there, and, what's more discouraging yet, a lot of saints to be persuaded that the millennium will come in God's way and not in theirs."

Every day I was more surprised in my father. His knowledge of the Bible was far greater than I had supposed, and I saw that, in spite of his shrewdness and his love of a good bargain, he had tried to be guided by its teachings and by the example of my godly mother. Thus had he established his reputation for honesty and veracity. It seemed to me hard then, and it seems to me harder now, in this day of liberty and Christian charity, that such a man should be kept from Christian fellowship during the active years of his life, merely because he lacked the emotional temperament necessary to what was called "a religious experience."

Stephen and I shared the same room, as we had done from babyhood. I knew he had something on his mind, and I guessed that it related to Rachel; but we were not on our old confidential terms, and I could ask him nothing. Our hearts were as tender toward each other as ever, but he knew that I did not sympathize with him in his religious life, and this knowledge put a barrier between us.

But one night he came upstairs late, with a look on

his face that went to my heart. There was no light in the room, but the moonlight showed me his secret.

"Steve," I said, "has Rachel Sylvestre been hurting you again?"

"Again?" he said. And then he came and sat down beside me. "I didn't suppose you knew she ever had hurt me."

"I'm not so blind as that. She has treated you cruelly, since you joined these new people. I can read the pain in your face, but, more plainly still, I can read the cruelty in hers. Don't worry about it, Steve, she isn't worth it."

Ah, how his eyes flashed in the moonlight! There is such a thing as a noble resentment, and Stephen was capable of it.

"You must not judge Rachel in that way," he said. "Her training has been very different from ours. Her father has taught her that all religion is irrational—mere superstition, unworthy of intelligent men and women. Her mind has been developed at the expense of her heart, that is all."

I wondered even then how Stephen could be so just and patient where his heart was concerned so deeply. It was his way, and I knew it was a better way than mine.

"Martha has heart enough," I said, to keep myself from saying anything more about Rachel.

"Martha is a child," he answered carelessly. But in this I thought he was mistaken.

He sat in silence a little while, then by and by he spoke of what was giving him pain.

"I didn't mean to tell any one," he said, "but it may be best that you should know. You will understand then why my life must lie away from here. And we

have been so happy here, in these last days. O God, we have been so happy."

These last words were at once a prayer of thanksgiving and the cry of a broken heart. I reached out and grasped my brother's hand.

"She has always had my heart, I think," he said, after awhile, speaking very quietly. "It was for her sake that I struggled to get a little education, and to know something about the great world outside. I don't know that, in those boyish days, I really hoped to win her, but I could not bear to put her to shame by my ignorance. Then, when she came home from school, I knew my destiny. She must be first in my life whether either of us wanted it to be so or not. I *had* to care what she liked, to know how she would feel about whatever I did. Don't think, Joseph, that she has ever, by so much as one look, encouraged me to believe that she cared for me. There has never lived on earth a woman with a nobler scorn of pretense and coquetry. Her face is an open book, and in it I have read friendship, companionship, interest, but affection, never. This, though, did not discourage me. I knew it would take years to win her, but she was worth it. I knew that a man of her own world, one with gifts to match her own, might come at any time to claim her, but I couldn't help feeling that our boy and girl friendship made a kind of tie between us; and if waiting and working were what was needed, I knew I could do both. Jacob served fourteen years for a Rachel whom I knew must have been less fair than mine.

"When I heard the sermon that showed me my duty and my future, my first thought was of Rachel. I knew her first feeling would be against the new religion. But I knew she had known the gospel of Christ only as it was covered over with error and human doctrines, and it

seemed that the truth must win even her. At any rate, in this one matter, her wish could not influence my choice. Perhaps you do not fully understand me, Joseph; but God grant the day may come when you will realize that one must follow the truth when it sees it to be true.

“When I began, in a stumbling way, to take part in religious meetings, the thought of speaking to the people on the first day of the week had never come into my mind. But the brethren put me forward, and, before I knew it, I was telling sinners what they must do to be saved. I knew only the little I could learn from my New Testament from day to day, but the people, long fed on the husks of meaningless doctrines, were hungry for the Word, and took the meager meal I had to give them. Many of them, hearing, believed and were baptized; and I was too happy to have any anxious thoughts about the future.

“You know the story of my first sermon after my return, but you will never know the joy I had in seeing father obey Christ, and in seeing him and mother united in the faith. You heard what Rachel said when we came out of the schoolhouse that night—but I must not speak of that. She was greatly agitated, for Martha had been moved by the preaching, and Rachel somehow blamed me for this.

“To-night I have been there for the first time since my return. Perhaps I was foolish to go, but I could not help it. I wanted to see her, and I hoped she would let me tell her something about my new life and my happiness in it. I think there is always in us a feverish impatience to know the worst—to have any anticipated agony over and done with. That is the way I felt. I told her everything—everything!—how much she is to me, and how much more yet my faith is to me. And now everything is over. I am not quite a coward, I hope, but I want to get away—to be where I can get used to the thought of living

without her. I ought to tell you, though, that I think my belief has nothing at all to do with the matter. Without that barrier, I might perhaps have remained her friend and comrade, but that would never have been enough. Such a friendship might even become a source of agony to me, when the time came to give her up. Some one will woo and win her, and it is better that I should be away."

He was silent for some time. When he spoke again, the excitement was past, and he began, in a very quiet tone, to tell me his plans.

He had received several letters lately, urging him to preach the gospel in an adjoining county. There were several infant churches there which had been organized and left with no one to care for them. The church at Rocksford also desired his services whenever he could give them. Here was his work, and he would go to it as soon as might be.

"And who will support you?" I asked. I had heard of wild-goose chases, and it seemed to me that this was one of them.

"I have supported myself since I was twenty-one. There is plowing in the spring and fall, and haying and harvesting in the summer, and chopping in the winter. The kind of work that I can do is plenty everywhere."

"But when will you study your sermons?"

Stephen laughed, and then grew sober. "I shall study the Book as I can—in the saddle, at noon in the field, at night by the fireside. But I fear the sermons will get studied very little. I shall tell the Story as well as I can—that is all I know how to do."

CHAPTER XII.

CAST ADRIFT.

It became known in the neighborhood that Stephen was going away, and that he would speak only once more in the schoolhouse. He was a favorite among the young folks, as he had always been, and they all came out to hear him. Not half of those who came could be seated on the benches. The rest stood up and leaned against the log walls.

Father had grumbled a good deal when he found that Stephen was to leave him again, and in the busy time of the year, but we all knew about how seriously to take father's grumbling. He was proud of Stephen, and he believed the new doctrine with all his heart. So he was really pleased to know that his boy was going to a larger life than he had known among us.

To-night he and mother sat near the front, and would not look at each other or at Stephen. In those days parents were much afraid of spoiling their children by showing pride in them.

Martha came to the meeting late, and seemed to be alone. I thought she looked very pale and anxious. But oh, how beautiful she was! I heard a shrewd person say only yesterday of Maude Arrondale (the young aunt of Sylvestre Arrondale the Fourth) that she cheapened the looks of every other woman when she entered a parlor. But the Maude Arrondale of to-day would be as moonlight to mid-day beside the Martha Sylvestre who sat opposite me on that evening long ago.

I am ashamed to say I can not remember what Stephen preached about that night. I know he was in earnest, and that he swayed the people as he would. I remember I thought what a strange thing it was that he, who had always been so sensible and staid, could be so taken up with mere doctrines as to be quite lifted out of himself. For the rest, I was thinking of other things than the sermon—of Rachel, especially, and her unkind treatment of Stephen.

Martha never once took her eyes from Stephen's face. Her chin was set hard, and for almost the first time I saw that she could be like Rachel. When the invitation was given for those who wanted to stand for the New Testament order of things to come forward, Martha started at once and walked to the front seat. She looked quiet and determined then, but in a moment she gave way and fell into a passion of sobs.

Stephen's quiet voice seemed to soothe her, and she stood up bravely before all the people, and said she believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I have heard that confession thousands of times since, but it has never stirred my heart as it did that night. I was a careless lad, and a moment before the great truths of revelation had had little meaning for me; but just then I seemed to realize what is meant by a surrender to the authority of the divine Saviour.

After the meeting the women gathered about Martha and kissed and coddled her, as good women love to coddle a sweet, motherless young creature. Then rude torches were brought out, and we hastily fell into line for a march to the baptismal water. It was a weird sight—the long, wavering line of men and women, a face here and there lighted by the flicker of a torch.

Some one broke into a song, and in a moment many voices took up the refrain:

"How happy are they
Who their Saviour obey."

I was near the end of the procession when we stopped at Blue Brook, lining up along the banks and on the bridge. Oddly enough, as it seemed to me, the spot chosen for the baptism was just below that where, when we were all children, Stephen and I first saw the Sylvestre girls. I smiled now at the memory of that day, remembering how Rachel had insisted on wading, while Martha had allowed Stephen to carry her across.

Stephen and Martha were already standing in the water when I came up. The light of a torch fell upon them, and I thought then, as I think now, that I had never seen two nobler faces.

"I baptize thee into the Name"—never had the sacred words seemed to mean as much.

After the baptism, the people crowded up to shake hands with Stephen, expressing regret at his leaving us, and wishes for his happiness elsewhere. I think the heartiness of their manner surprised him, for he was ever inclined to think poorly of himself.

"I shall come back soon," he told me, as we walked home together. "A little church might soon be gathered together here from among those who are tired of party creeds and names. Here, as everywhere, people are hungry for the gospel. They desire salvation, but they know not how to seek it."

"I wonder what Colonel Sylvestre will say to Martha?" I remarked.

"Poor little girl!" said Stephen, in a tone of compas-

sion. "I fear she has a sorry time ahead of her. But I know her nature, and I feel sure she will not shrink."

We had much to say and do that night, for Stephen was to leave us in the early morning. It was past eleven o'clock when we retired, and we were but just in bed when we heard a frightened voice calling:

"Mrs. Arrondale! Oh, Mrs. Arrondale!"

I heard my mother rise quickly and open the door. She was in such demand as a nurse that I doubted not it was some sudden illness in the neighborhood which called for her presence. But for some time I heard low voices in the kitchen; then mother came to the door and spoke very softly to Stephen and me.

"Colonel Sylvestre has turned Martha out of doors," she said, "and she has sought a refuge here. I thought it best to tell you, so you need not seem surprised when you see her in the morning. Do not answer me—it will be better for her not to hear us talking. Only"—even in a whisper mother's voice betrayed her excitement—"slip away very quietly in the morning, Stephen. The Colonel threatens to horsewhip you if he gets a chance."

Mother slipped downstairs again, but for a long time Stephen and I talked under our breath of the dreadful thing that had happened. It seemed incredible that a father who was as indulgent as Colonel Sylvestre usually showed himself to be, should be so utterly cruel in dealing with his daughter's religious feelings, especially a daughter as obedient and gentle as Martha had always been.

"If it had been Rachel," I began. But Stephen loyally reminded me that Rachel, too, was a most dutiful daughter.

"But why did Rachel let her father cast Martha off?" I demanded.

“You will find that Rachel knows nothing about it,” he insisted. “She is not always gentle, but she always tries to be just. And her influence over her father is very great.”

Next day, after we had said good-by to Stephen, my mother told me the whole story. Martha had again and again asked her father for permission to be baptized, and had always received a peremptory refusal.

“Religion is simply childishness,” he told her once. “The race had its childhood. It began with gods that were close at hand, and by degrees it has put them farther and farther away, until now even the credulous believe only in a remote Being, to be turned to merely in the extremities of life. The really intellectual have no use whatever for such a being. You, my daughter, should have come out of the childishness of credulity long before this.”

Martha persevered in her request, but to no purpose. She begged Rachel to plead with her father, but this the elder sister refused to do.

“You will think differently about these things when you are older,” said Rachel. “These persons play upon your feelings and lead you to imagine all kinds of painful things. Try to forget it all, my little one.”

I do not think it ever occurred either to Rachel or her father that Martha might finally act in opposition to the wishes of her family. They were so accustomed to her gentle obedience that they anticipated nothing else. They little dreamed of what such natures are capable. The fires of martyrdom have been lighted for women of Martha's type.

Rachel had left home on the previous day for a visit with a friend who lived five or six miles distant. Martha fancied that she chose this time purposely, not wishing to

show sufficient interest in the meeting to attend it, and scarcely daring to absent herself without an excuse. This seemed highly probable to me, knowing what had passed between her and Stephen.

When Martha returned from the meeting, in company with some of the good women who had assisted at her baptism, she was surprised to find her father still up. She learned afterward that Ross Turner, bent on mischief, as usual, had stopped and told the story of her disobedience.

Martha said good-night to her friends, slipped into the house, and went straight to her father.

"I have come to tell you what I have done, father."

He felt her damp hair for confirmation of what he had heard. Then he pushed her from him.

"I have heard," he said. "You have disobeyed your father. When a child of mine disobeys, she ceases to belong to me. Go back to your ranting, hymn-singing crew. Go back and ask them if they put disobedience to parents among the cardinal virtues. Go back to them—your place is no longer here."

I am sure that, in his coarse rage, he said other things which both her daughterly loyalty and her maidenly reserve forbade her telling. I am sure that, in some rude way, he accused her of a liking for either Stephen or myself. This I judge from what I saw afterwards.

"You do not mean that you are sending me away from home?" asked Martha, in amazement.

"Have I not made it plain? You shall not sleep another night under this roof. I tell you, I am done with you—do you hear me?"

There was no house but ours within her reach, where Martha felt that she would be understood and welcomed. Thus it was that she came, with wet hair and tear-stained cheeks, to the door of the Arrondales that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PIONEER PREACHER.

Martha remained with us a little more than a week. She seemed shy, and pitifully afraid of giving trouble; and I fancy there were times when the thought of her father's cruel treatment made her very sad. But when she sat with my mother, and engaged in conversation, I noted in her that same freedom and delight which I had first seen in the Osburn home at Rocksford. To be in religious society and speak of the subjects nearest her heart gave her intense happiness.

A day or two after she came to us, the voluble Arabel Holcomb appeared. She said she had come to get the rule for my mother's pound cake, but I knew this was a mere excuse. She had heard that Martha had been sent from home, no doubt, and desired full particulars. Persons like Arabel are not really malicious, but they must talk, and the fresher their gossip the readier the market they find for it.

My mother was ever of the quickest wit, and when she saw Arabel riding up the lane she sent Martha away to her room.

"I'll attend to Arabel, my dear," she said. "Joseph shall stay with me, and between us we will protect you."

As Arabel entered, her eyes took in every detail of the room, from the big fireplace, which Martha had just filled with fresh green boughs, to the big-flowered curtains of the "recess" which served my mother as a bedroom.

"Why, where is Martha?" she asked. "Ross Turner said he was sure he saw her here this morning. I was over

at her house last night, and her father said she was away. That's every word I could get out of him. I suppose he sent her away for getting baptized. Ross thought he would, though he didn't say a word when Ross told him. The Sylvestres are queer people, aren't they? They never seem to have anything to say about their own affairs. Do you suppose the Colonel will cut Martha out of his property? Ross says it would be just like him."

Mother broke in at about this point to say that Martha was indeed spending a short time with us, but was very weary, and had been persuaded to rest for a time in her room.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed My Lady Arabel, quite undaunted, "I'll go in and see her for a little before I go away. I know she would be disappointed if she did not see me."

I was casting about for some means of averting this dreadful catastrophe, when there came a gentle knock, and Rachel Sylvestre entered at the open door.

The Sphinx herself could not wear a more inscrutable face than belonged to this young woman as she advanced in greeting. She kissed my mother, which surprised me a little, for, except with Martha, Rachel's manner had ever seemed more dignified and self-contained than is common with girls of her age.

I think she guessed before she came that she would find Arabel at our house. At any rate, she betrayed no surprise.

"How is Martha to-day?" she asked my mother. "Rather tired and nervous, I fear."

"She is tired," my mother answered, "but most admirably self-contained."

"Indeed! I will not bother her about trifles to-day, but I have some gowns to make for her, and must see after the

fitting by to-morrow. I suppose you know, Arabel, that Martha is going back to her school in Rocksford soon?"

"La! is she, though?" asked Arabel, quite taken aback by this piece of information. "Why, I thought she came home to stay!"

"Martha is far too young and unsophisticated to leave school for good. She was very happy at Rocksford, and was making good progress there. She did indeed feel that she was needed at home, and ought to come back, but father and I both think it is best that she should go on with her studies for some time yet."

"And will she board with the Osburns again?" asked my mother, with a little eagerness.

Rachel's eyes flashed and then cooled. "No," she said, carelessly, "she will be in the home of the school principal."

She looked up at the clock. "I have many things to do and must hurry back," she said. "Perhaps Martha is sleeping, and I will not disturb her. Give her my love, and tell her to accumulate a stock of patience, so she will be ready for the gowns. Come, Arabel, you can walk your horse past our house, can you not?" And she actually carried the light-headed girl away with her.

The indignation in our little community, when it became generally known that Colonel Sylvestre had turned his daughter out of doors, was almost unbounded. He was not a popular man, although his imposing airs kept people in a certain awe of him. Rachel, too, was feared rather than loved. With all of her good-breeding, there was about her an air of pride and conscious superiority which was generally resented. But little Martha (it seemed natural to say "little Martha," although she was really a tall and stately-looking girl) was everybody's favorite. None feared or stood aloof from her. Girls

like Arabel copied Rachel's style, but they borrowed Martha's patterns.

"It's a burnin' shame," said old Zephaniah Leech, to his audience at the village store. "It's a burnin' shame for old man Sylvestre to come down so hard on that pooty little gal o' his'n. Religion? What's the harm in religion? Women air bound to hev it, an' I hold that it does 'em good—makes 'em kinder peaceable, an' easy satisfied. Now, ef that oldest Sylvestre hed some, it might 'a' took the high-an'-mightiness out o' *her*."

"I wonder," said Ross Turner, thoughtfully, as he carefully carved his initials into a pine stick, "whether old man Sylvestre will cut Martha out of his property."

"I guess probably not," was old Zephaniah's conjecture. "I guess not, or he wouldn't be payin' for her schoolin'."

But the public little knew how the matter of the "schoolin'" had been achieved.

I learned afterward that Rachel, on returning from her visit, had found her father in a storm of rage over what he called Martha's ingratitude. He declared that he would never again receive the girl into his home—that she had made her bed, and might lie in it.

Rachel was very quiet during this outbreak. She was always quiet when she was angry, and I think that she was angry now both at her father and at Martha.

But after a little she began to talk to him about the unpleasant comment there would be, if Martha should continue to live in the neighborhood and outside of her own home. She was not prepared to earn her own living, and it would be a disgrace to her father to let her religious friends support her. How much better, then, to send her back to school, until such time as her longing for her home should bring her humbly back to seek it!

No one else could have conquered the Colonel, but Rachel did. She knew his weak point, and toward it she aimed the arrows of her woman's wit. Before she was done with him, she made him promise that Martha should be sent to school again.

To my surprise, Martha did not altogether like the plan. "I want to go and work," she said. "It must be there is something I can do. I am not as ignorant as Rachel thinks. It is only because she herself knows so much, that I seem to her so helpless. I can sew, and I know that in some large town I might find families who would give me employment as seamstress. I have thought it all over, and I would rather have it that way."

I knew how she felt—that it would be painful to receive support from a parent who refused to recognize her as his child. It was love, not money, that Martha craved. But my parents advised her to fall in with Rachel's plan, since to refuse would be but to harden her father's heart the more resolutely against her.

So Martha went back to Rocksford, where she found a warm welcome from the Osburns and other members of the little church. I heard nothing from her directly for many months, and I have little record of the time that followed her departure. It must have been without incident, or I would recall more concerning it. Among my old papers I have been able to find nothing save this letter from Stephen. I give it in full, for, though some parts of it relate to matters outside of this family history, it tells the life of the gospel pioneer of those heroic days:

ROCKSFORD, Ohio, July 10, 18—.

MY DEAR JOSEPH:—

As Mr. Osburn goes to Blue Brook to-morrow, I make haste to pen a few lines to be sent by him. I have been here for a week now, helping him and his men in the

harvest field by day, and by night speaking to the brethren and others as I have opportunity. It surprises me that the people will come together at night after their hard day's work, but I tell you, Joseph, souls are hungry for the bread of the gospel. They have been fed upon the husks of theology too long. Almost every night we go from the place of meeting to the waters of baptism, and often, as we go down into the water, persons press forward to make the good confession.

Before returning to this place, I spent two weeks in M——, where much interest was manifested. I went out one day to a schoolhouse, seven miles from town, at the urgent request of a good sister who desired that her husband might know the way of the Lord more perfectly. The man, at the conclusion of the discourse, came forward to be baptized, and with him five others. I had not thought to take a change of clothing with me, but I was kindly provided for by the candidate, and baptism was administered in the same hour.

Traveling about at my own expense has depleted my purse, and my wardrobe is none the better for some months of horseback riding. So I am glad of an opportunity to earn a little of the means with which to replenish. The brethren give me free welcome to their homes, and I have a good bed and good food wherever I go. But of cash they themselves have little, and my horse and my clothing I must find for myself.

Martha is a great blessing to the little company of believers here. Really, there is in this gentle young girl a strength of purpose and a power of persuasion which I could never have believed to exist. Night after night she leads her young friends forward to the front seat, her beautiful face shining as with the joy of heaven. She makes me think of the vestal virgins of the olden time, set apart sacredly to the service of the temple.

Write a line and send it back by Mr. Osburn, if it is convenient for you to do so. Tell me particularly concerning the health of father and mother. I desire greatly to see you all, and trust I may do so soon.

Do you ever see Rachel? Please do not be afraid to write concerning her. I have sometimes thought you avoided the subject, through fear of giving me pain. A thought has come to me concerning her of late which I am bound to mention. Is your heart enlisted there? If it is, do not be afraid to say so. I could not but grieve to see your life linked with that one who has no faith; but so far as I am concerned there is no reason why you should fear. Rachel Sylvestre and I are as far apart as if we had never looked into each other's faces.

With great affection,

Faithfully yours,

STEPHEN ARRONDALE.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHALLENGE.

One evening in September I went over to the Sylvestres on an errand for father. I had not seen Rachel in weeks, and it struck me that she had changed greatly. Her face was thinner and sharper than before, and her eyes had a worried look which was quite new to them. I remembered when I saw her to have heard some one remark that her father was growing peevish and quarrelsome, and that it was very difficult for any one to please him.

I did my errand and was going away, when Rachel said, "Wait just a moment, Joseph—I must speak to you. Does Stephen mention Martha in his letters?"

The look of eagerness in her face went to my heart. I told her the little I knew—that Martha was well, and was busy with her studies.

"Father does not wish us to correspond," Rachel said, as if in explanation of her question. "It seems like a hard requirement, but Martha and I are agreed that it is wise and right to obey. You will send her my love, will you not, Joseph?"

She looked into my eyes as I promised, and a sudden feeling came to me that I was near to her and understood her heart. "Rachel," I said, "if you believed as Martha does, you would do exactly as she has done."

"I could not believe as Martha does," she said, turning away and trying to speak coldly. "But"—her eyes turned back to mine—"I do not blame Martha."

“Why, then, do you blame Stephen?” I was tempted to ask; but prudence came to my aid and stopped my tongue.

I hoped that we might be better friends after this, and that I might help her to keep informed about Martha. But when next we met there was the old reserve and formality.

Stephen made us two or three visits, and each time he left a message from Martha, but he did not go to the Sylvestre home. On the last two of the visits, however, he saw Rachel.

The incidents of these visits stand out in my mind more clearly than does most of this history, for they were of a character quite new to our community. Excitement of any kind was scarce, and whatever transpired was long remembered.

Stephen was to spend Sunday with us, and through the instrumentality of some of our more influential neighbors, he was asked to speak in the new Town Hall. This building had just been completed and was an object of some pride in our primitive community.

The hall was filled. A few extremely partisan members of the two churches had remained away, but they were all. The rest of the town was there.

“Makes me think of a funeral,” said old Zephaniah Leech as he came shuffling in. He did not mean that there was anything at all funereal about the character of the services, but that the occasion had called out a general attendance of all classes. In these days people are so much occupied that they can not take time for the funeral of an acquaintance unless they are bound by the obligations of some lodge or crafts union; but then it was very different.

As I looked about the room, I was surprised, almost startled, to see Colonel Sylvestre on the back seat. To this day, I do not know why he came. I suppose he thought he had an idea that there might come some opportunity to revenge himself upon Stephen, whom he undoubtedly hated with a deep and dreadful hatred. But he may have come simply with the thought of entertaining his guest—for beside the Colonel, and between him and Rachel, sat Cady Vincent, the young Universalist preacher.

If I was surprised to see the Colonel there, I was scarcely less surprised at the sight of Rachel. I am sure that she herself could not have told why she came. For one brief moment I had felt that I understood her. Now she seemed further from my comprehension than ever before.

The situation was as difficult for Stephen as could well be imagined. Here was the woman who had rejected him, his apparently favored rival, and the enemy who had threatened to have vengeance upon him. And before all these he must preach.

I may say right here that I had never feared that Colonel Sylvestre would carry out his threat of horse-whipping Stephen. He had too much dignity, and cared too much for the respect of his neighbors, to seek revenge in such a primitive fashion. The threat had been made in a moment of bitter anger, and no doubt it had caused poor Martha much anxiety. But I knew perfectly well that it would never be executed. The Colonel's retaliation would be of a more polished sort.

Perhaps it was because of the peculiar circumstances and the intensity of my sympathy; but I know that Stephen's preaching took hold upon me that day as it never had taken hold of me before. Looking back upon that time, I am led to believe that the character of his preaching had changed very greatly. He was no longer a

boy, repeating what he had learned from the lips of others. He was a man, with a man's message, straight from the Book itself. Stephen could not have been an ordinary man, in any event, for he was a born leader and would have influenced other lives anywhere; but he never could have been as great elsewhere as he was in the work which called out the deepest convictions and made the expression of them a part of his very life.

Up to this time I had conceived of religion as largely a matter of sentiment and emotion. While I was never what is called an irreligious boy, I had never been given to studying the Bible for myself, as Stephen had been, and the preaching I had heard had made no direct appeal to my reason. But to-day, the thought of my personal relation to God took sudden hold upon me.

Perhaps there had come to me, in these last months, an unconscious desire to be one with those I loved, in the holiest of all bonds. If so, that desire really made itself known to me to-day for the first time.

In the little Bible which I bought soon afterward is marked, in ink now so faded that I can but just see the lines, the text from which Stephen preached that day:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

If I should tell you what he said, my sweet Maud Arrondale would be sure to cry out, "Why, Grandpa Joseph, that's just what my pastor said last Sunday! I don't think there is anything very wonderful about *that!*"

Yes, my dear, but please remember that Stephen preached his sermon first! The truth is, that the pioneers made the great sermons we hear to-day. Your modern preachers merely put on the ornamentation.

The argument from prophecy was clearly laid down; prophecy was verified by history. Before I was aware how I was being carried along by the message, I seemed to stand before the conquering Son of God, the one victorious over death and hell, the one who is alive forevermore.

"The tremendous fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Stephen, "stands as a challenge to the world. The evidence is complete. It can not be disproved. Many persons of to-day would be glad, like those of the olden time, to give large sums of money to do away with this fact and the responsibility it brings, but they can not. There remains to confront them, not the stolen body of a Galilean peasant, but the presence of the living Son of God, growing every year more powerful, marching, as the centuries pass, to greater conquests; the Messiah of the Old Testament, the Saviour of the New."

"I accept the challenge!"

The words cut through the stillness of the room like the snap of a whip-lash. Colonel Sylvestre had risen, and stood with his finger pointed at the speaker. Stephen paused, and waited respectfully for the Colonel to go on.

"I accept the challenge," he repeated. "The young gentleman speaks with the extreme confidence of ignorance. He will be wiser after some years of investigation. He says that the fact of the resurrection stands as a challenge. I accept the challenge. If he is willing to stand by his guns, well and good. I will, within a week, bring here a man who will prove that the resurrection of Jesus is a myth, that the so-called miracles had their origin in the folk-lore of a credulous people, that the teachings of Jesus were borrowed, that he was himself a misled enthusiast. What do you say, sir?"

"I say bring on your man!" Stephen's voice rang out like the call of a trumpet. Perhaps the Colonel had not

anticipated such a prompt response. At any rate, he sat down without more ado.

After this interruption it was difficult to bring the meeting to an orderly close. There was a little buzz of comment through the room. It continued during the hymn, and was scarcely hushed for the concluding prayer. After this, the people gathered together in little knots to discuss the situation.

If Stephen had represented some other religious organization, public sympathy would have been most decidedly with him. Colonel Sylvestre was not popular, and the manner of his challenge was considered discourteous. But as Stephen was one of the so-called "Campbellites," it was natural that there should be a difference of opinion.

"The only way to get Campbellism out of this town is to stomp it out," said Deacon Meacham. "I've heard how it is in Rocksford, and it'll be the same here. Give 'em an inch and they'll take an ell. They ort to be stomped out, no matter who does it."

"I guess Old Man Sylvestre ain't going to let go of Steve Arrondale any too easy," Ross Turner said. "I heard he threatened to horsewhip him for baptizing Martha."

"He's gettin' pretty old for that kind o' business," said Zephaniah Leech. "But we never get too old for tongue-lashing—not in this world."

Years afterward I heard of other comments which were passed that afternoon. Colonel Sylvestre, Rachel and the Reverend Cady Vincent rode home together in the fine, new carriage which the Colonel had just bought. Rachel was silent and the Colonel seemed weary and unnerved. The burden of conversation, therefore, fell upon the guest.

"You flung down the gauntlet quite fearlessly to-day, Colonel," said Mr. Vincent, in his deferential fashion.

"I only wish a Universalist might have the honor of accepting your challenge."

"I fear I made a mistake," said the Colonel, in his grand fashion. "The temptation to have the boy's ridiculous arguments exposed was too much for me at the time, but I presume it is foolish to notice such ignorance so far as to challenge its statements. No doubt I merely catered to the fellow's self-esteem, instead of correcting it."

"I judge from all I can hear," said Mr. Vincent, "that these Campbellites are in general a very ignorant people. Men like the Campbells themselves, and other leaders among them, are college-bred, but their preachers are for the most part illiterate men, who have taken up their calling on a week's notice, and are poorly prepared to be leaders for the people."

"Stephen Arrondale is not an illiterate man!" cried Rachel, flashing up as she used to sometimes when we were children. "You heard him to-day, and you know he is not. I met no man in the East who was his superior in real education. You and father both know that it is unjust to call him ignorant."

Mr. Vincent was at that stage of his love-making when one is inclined to take everything playfully. "Aha, Miss Sylvestre," he said, "so you like his preaching better than mine! I am really inclined to jealousy. Let us see—is he not a brother of the young Arrondale whom I met at your house last year? He was evidently a most humble worshiper at your shrine. Perhaps it is for his sake that you champion this very unconventional young preacher."

"The Arrondales are the best friends we ever had, Mr. Vincent," Rachel said, speaking, I doubt not, in the dignified tone that we all feared. "Stephen and Joseph were the playmates and protectors of my sister and me in childhood. Their mother closed the eyes of mine in death. It

would ill become us to withhold from them now the respect and friendship which are their due."

Mr. Vincent and Rachel were sitting together on the back seat. Colonel Sylvestre, from his position in front, had been listening closely to the conversation. Now he turned around, and said in a loud voice:

"Rachel, you need never speak to any of the Arrondales again or mention them in my presence."

No doubt Mr. Vincent was delighted, but he need not have been. There are some women who can safely be commanded, but we Arrondales knew very well that Rachel Sylvestre was not one of them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEBATE.

Next day Colonel Sylvestre rode away. As he passed our house, Stephen told us that he was undoubtedly going after a well-known infidel lecturer by the name of Horatio Lemmerman.

That night I overheard father and mother "talking it over." They always talked everything over. I have known but one other household where there was the same reasonableness in the discussion of family affairs. Sometimes they thought differently, and neither was by any means a person of weak will. Yet in the end they agreed, and there was no "last word." Each modified the other, and in action, when the time came for it, there was a beautiful unity. Their religious discussions had seemed to be the only ones which did not end in this way; but now that they had ended I could see in them, too, there had been the same desire for a common meeting-ground.

About the proposed debate they held very different opinions. Mother thought that Stephen, in his youth and inexperience, ran a great risk in debating with a man accomplished in all the arts of intellectual juggling.

"You know it is not for Stephen that I am concerned. It is for the great cause of religion in this community. Much is at stake. Don't you think it would be better to send for some experienced debater, who will know about what this infidel is likely to say, and be able to meet him?"

"No," said father, "I can't look at it in that way. Colonel Sylvestre wants to crush Stephen and ruin his influence. He hoped, by that challenge, to stop Stephen's mouth, or, at least, to put him at a disadvantage before

the audience. But Stephen stood by his guns and won the day. If he should send for somebody else now, the Colonel would use it to his harm. I own it's a risk, and I feel anxious; but the boy has always known what he was about, and I guess he does now."

The debate was to begin on Thursday morning of the following week. In the meantime Stephen rode over to Rocksford to consult some books owned by one of his friends. Books!—how scarce they were and how we craved them. The little library of Colonel Sylvestre was the only collection owned in our community, and in it there was not a book which had been bought within the past twenty years. Stephen had not more than fifteen volumes in the world, and only two or three of these bore upon Christian evidences.

"I have only one thing in the way of preparation," he told me. "In times past I have been so put to it for books that I have read all that the Colonel has in his library. They did not hurt me then, and they may be useful to me now. At least, I know what the infidels were saying twenty-five years ago. They may have a new set of arguments by this time, but I have no means of knowing what they are."

Considering how sparsely settled the country was, and how slight were our means of communication, it was surprising that the news of Colonel Sylvestre's challenge and Stephen's acceptance traveled as it did. When the day for the debate came, vehicles of all kinds came from all directions, bringing those who desired to hear the discussion. It was twenty miles to Rocksford, yet nearly every member of the little church there was present. The interest of the people there was very keen, not only, as I learned afterward, because of their loyalty to their faith, but also because of their personal love for Stephen and

Martha. Naturally, they judged Colonel Sylvestre to be a tyrant; for Martha was so gentle and affectionate that none but a hard parent, whatever his belief, could have dealt severely with her.

It chanced that I did not see Mr. Lemmerman until the morning on which the discussion began. He was a large, rather loosely built man, with a flowing gray beard and bright but not keen dark eyes. He and Colonel Sylvestre came in arm in arm, with the air of conquerors marching to victory. Following them came the Reverend Cady Vincent and Rachel Sylvestre.

I did not, of course, know that Rachel had been forbidden to speak to Stephen and me, but Mr. Vincent did, and I fear her conduct did not give him a high opinion of her daughterly obedience. For, as she passed near Stephen on her way to a seat, she bowed and smiled gravely. Her father's eyes were upon her, but he took no notice of her action, then or afterward. Probably he would have excused his own laxity by saying that she had not spoken and that he had not forbidden her the privilege of bowing to the Arrondales.

I am quite aware that the different things I write down concerning Rachel Sylvestre often must seem inconsistent. But since that time, and even down to the present, I have known many beautiful and high-spirited women whose actions had the outward appearance of inconsistency.

The moderator of the debate was old Judge Oliphant, who was considered the ablest lawyer in the county. He was a rotund, jolly old gentleman, who took snuff frequently and laughed immoderately at every sally of wit.

I wish I had notes of the discussion, but perhaps if I had, there would be little in them to interest the present generation. That day was long ago—farther away from us in religious thought than in actual years. I have but to

close my eyes to live over again that past of which I once was a part, but only the pen of genius can make the past live again for those who have never shared it. And I am no genius, but a trembling old man seeking to set down a few plain facts as they come back to him.

If I remember correctly, the points of discussion were about as follows:

Is the Bible the inspired word of God?

Was Jesus of Nazareth the divine Son of God?

Are we justified in believing in a future life?

On the first point, Mr. Lemmerman had the opening speech. In denying the inspiration of the Scriptures, he indulged in many jests which I could not but think in poor taste. He laughed at the plagues of Egypt and at the idea of Joshua's stopping the sun in the heavens. He complained of the destruction of the Canaanites and the smiting of the first-born. That was all. He brought forward no arguments beyond the general inference that a just God could not express himself in acts like these.

Yet the impression upon the audience had been surprisingly strong. The speaker's big, assertive manner, his coarse humor, even his apparent satisfaction with his own effort, told for much. I was surprised that it was so, but the evidence was there in scores of admiring faces. Colonel Sylvestre looked triumphant. Rachel studied the tips of her pretty boots while the Reverend Cady Vincent whispered something in her ear.

Stephen began very quietly, reminding the audience that his opponent had not spoken to the question of the inspiration of the Bible, but merely concerning the justice of certain acts there recorded. He then gave a rapid outline of the Bible, in its general divisions, and some rules of interpretation. He urged his hearers to distinguish carefully between the different epochs of God's dealing

with men and his messages to each. He said that God's word to the race in its childhood was a word to a child, spoken sometimes in the plain language of physical rewards and punishments. Then he began to speak of the testimony of the Bible to itself, the unity of its parts one with another, the whole an expression of God's effort for the race as finally consummated in the gift of his Son.

It is old ground now, but in those days people had less conception of the logical arrangement of the Scriptures. A Bible verse was a Bible verse, whether found in Deuteronomy or in John's Gospel.

It was difficult to judge of the effect of Stephen's speech, so lacking was it in the play of wit which pleases a popular audience. In the afternoon Mr. Lemmerman wasted half an hour in an attempt to reply to it, but I noticed that his humor was rather less merry than it had been in the morning.

Rachel was absent from the afternoon session, but the Reverend Cady Vincent was there, keeping close to the Colonel. Stephen made the opening speech on the second question. I need not go into it at length. It laid stress upon the acknowledged existence and genuineness of the prophecies concerning Christ, of the unrefuted testimonies concerning his life, the proofs of his resurrection, the witness of those who gave up their lives for him, and, above all, the impossibility of his life and character having been the creation of human intelligence. If his life were an ideal, why did other human ideals fall so immeasurably below it? Why had men for eighteen hundred years, in all poetry and art and philosophy, borrowed from this ideal, instead of improving upon it?

It was at this point that Stephen suddenly changed and became a man of fire. It seemed to me that I had never known him before. Heretofore he had been quiet, cau-

tious, feeling his way, careful never to force his conclusions. But now his theme took possession of him. He became suddenly assertive, with the divine assertiveness of him who sees the chariots of heaven and the horsemen thereof.

"Parallel, if you can, the sayings of the Man of Nazareth," he cried out. "They are divine, and can not be paralleled in human speech. Do you say they are put into his mouth by another? By whom? By Paul? Then it is Paul whom I worship. By Peter? Then it is Peter at whose feet I sit. But leave us the utterances of Jesus, and we still have the utterances of the Son of God."

In his reply, Mr. Lemmerman showed himself a man of much smaller caliber than I had supposed him. He was no debater, in the proper sense of the word, but was merely a retailer of the stock of objections and the coarse jests of a certain class of infidels of his day. He called up some so-called discrepancies in the records of the four evangelists, then left the direct line of discussion altogether to ridicule the idea that the world could be saved from sin through the shedding of innocent blood.

It was well on toward night when he finished, and the busy farmers who had been listening to the discussion all day should have been about their "chores" by this time; but when the moderator said it should be left to the people whether or not they would listen to the closing speech on the second point before adjourning, they were all for going on.

I realized by this time that the sympathy of the audience was with Stephen, and I gloried in it, though in my heart it was a subject of mortification to me that he had not a foeman more nearly worthy of his steel. I did not know then, nor do I know now, whether Horatio Lemmerman was a representative champion of the infidelity

of his day. I only know that he was the one furnished for it. But I might have known even then, if I had paused to reason upon it, that truth will always have stronger advocates than error.

In replying to Mr. Lemmerman's last speech, Stephen had opportunity (thanks to his opponent's digressions) to bring in review the sacrifice of Christ for a ruined race. In those days there was much mysterious and confusing teaching concerning the Atonement, and I dare say Stephen was glad to set forth the plain teaching of the Scriptures. He cared little for a mere victory of words; but, like Paul, he was ever watchful of an opportunity to preach the gospel to some who might not otherwise hear it.

Many were moved by his argument that day, as I well know, for many told me afterward that they dated a change in their lives from that day. For myself, I no longer saw upon the cross a helpless victim, needlessly crushed beneath the weight of human sin, but a divine will, voluntarily bowing itself to human limitations, that once and for all the human and divine might meet.

"It was the only way," said Stephen, solemnly, in closing; and my own heart answered, "It was the only way."

In leaving the building, I came upon Rachel. How or when she had come I did not know. I was about to speak to her, when she was joined by the Reverend Cady Vincent.

"At last!" she exclaimed lightly. "I thought this was to be a debate, but it turns out to be a revival meeting."

My heart had been full of good thoughts a moment before, but they seemed to take sudden flight. I was a very foolish and hot-headed boy, and at that moment I almost hated Rachel Sylvestre.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEQUEL.

The next morning the Town Hall was filled at an early hour, for all wished to hear the concluding speeches of the debate. Rachel was again present. She did not sit with her father, but with the other ladies, quite to the other side of the house. She did not notice Stephen or me in any way, but I saw that she bowed to my mother, and presently exchanged a few words with her. I do not know whether or not the Colonel would have considered my gentle mother "an Arrondale."

I had wondered that Mr. Lemmerman, after claiming to set aside the authenticity of the Scriptures and the authority of Christ, should have cared to discuss the question of a future life. Stephen had taken it, as I learned afterward, that he would discuss merely such evidences of the continuance of life as exist in nature and in the human reason, and had prepared himself quite carefully on these points.

But what Mr. Lemmerman had desired was merely a new point for his attack on Christianity. He began as he had begun the day before, with coarse ridicule and sarcasm. A good God these Christians must have, indeed, to create immortal souls, and then damn them for his own glory! A beneficent law, indeed, which condemned the innocent and the guilty to suffer together for the vindication of a righteous God!

His attack was, of course, quite foreign to the question as it had been stated; but it dealt with matters which, though seldom touched upon in these days, were of vital interest then. Stephen was on the alert in a moment. My

father's keen old eyes twinkled. Indeed, I had often, in days gone by, heard him argue these questions with far more fairness and intelligence than Horatio Lemmerman was capable of showing.

It was a great day. From nine in the morning until four in the afternoon the battle was on. Yesterday Stephen had had all Christian believers with him. To-day the large proportion of them stood aloof, shocked at the coarse atheism of Stephen's opponent, indeed, but scarcely less shocked at the audacity of the bold-fronted young "Campbellite" who dared to condemn as unscriptural and misleading many doctrines which they had venerated from childhood—aye, that had come to them as part of the inheritance for which their forefathers had died.

"You say," he told his antagonist, "that Christianity stands for the sovereignty of a tyrant. I tell you that the Holy Scriptures stand for the sovereignty of a loving Father, who has, in a beneficence which he will not revoke, bestowed upon each of his children the right of free and intelligent choice. In him is no caprice, no injustice. He lays hold upon none against their will, either for approval or condemnation. He has made known his will for us through his Son, in whom is eternal life. On each of us he lays the burden of choice. All doctrines concerning the whys and wherefores of God's gift of eternal life are mere speculations, and we have no right to bind them on any man. But it is our right and duty to set before every one life and death, blessing and cursing, that he may have the opportunity for choice. And by that choice God himself will abide."

By the will of the audience and the permission of the moderator, each speaker was allowed three speeches, two each on the question of the day and one each for a general

summary. Most of the people had brought lunch with them, and, during the recess, I noticed that they gathered together in little groups. The Baptists were by themselves, and so were the Presbyterians, and so were the Methodists. The few outspoken infidels gathered about Horatio Lemmerman and Colonel Sylvestre. The Reverend Cady Vincent had said a word to Rachel, and then left the building. I saw him walk across the fields and into the woods beyond, and wondered why he had so suddenly come to prefer solitude.

At the conclusion of the debate Judge Oliphant made a long speech, in which he complimented both speakers, the Bible, atheism, the audience, and every other person and thing which he could call to mind. When he could think of nothing else, he said, "I believe our very profitable session is now at an end."

"Not quite. With your permission, Mr. Moderator, and that of the gentlemen who have engaged in this discussion, I wish to say a very few words."

I recognized the thin, clear voice at once. The Reverend Cady Vincent, with a strange look of agitation upon his face, was making his way to the front.

"He is going to challenge Stephen to a debate on the question of eternal punishment," I said to myself. Probably the moderator thought the same thing, for he nodded with apparent comprehension as he said, "I am sure we are all willing to accord the reverend gentleman the privilege for which he asks."

The look of agitation on Mr. Vincent's face deepened. "I wish to ask Mr. Arrondale a few questions," he said.

Stephen nodded, as if to intimate that he was ready to answer. I suspected that there was a trap, and that Colonel Sylvestre had baited it.

“You are identified, I am told, with a people who call themselves Christians, or disciples of Christ, but are sometimes called ‘Campbellites’ by their enemies?”

“I am.”

“Is it true, as I have heard, that the people with whom you stand take the Holy Scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice?”

“It is.”

“Is it true, as I have understood you to say during this debate, that of him who comes to the door of the church in apparently sincere repentance, you ask no question and demand no statement of doctrine beyond his avowal of his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God?”

“It is.”

“Mr. Arrondale, I am known to this community as a Universalist preacher. Knowing me as such, would you receive me to baptism on such a simple confession of my faith as I have indicated?”

“I most certainly should, and thank God for the opportunity.”

“Then this audience is entitled to an explanation, which I shall try to make as brief as possible. For six years I have been preaching Universalism. I realize now that my teaching has been not constructive, but destructive. It has been directed against doctrines which, as I believed, and still believe, rob God of some of his attributes as a loving and beneficent Father. But I now see that I have merely sought to overthrow the speculations of others with speculations of my own. I am not sure that, in all minor matters, I agree with the people known as disciples of Christ, but I am willing to recognize my obligation to examine all theories in the light of this one great central truth of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, to speak where the Scriptures speak and to remain silent where

they are silent. Mr. Arrondale, yesterday I was here to listen, to question, perhaps to criticize. To-day I am here to require baptism at your hands."

I had not liked Cady Vincent very well hitherto, but now my heart went out to him in a sudden gush of admiration. It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that his act was one of the bravest acts that I have ever known. No one could see him in the presence of Rachel Sylvestre and doubt his love for her. He had left ease and cultured associations in his Eastern home to be near her. Her father had given him every evidence of favor. Yet for conscience' sake he had put all this aside—had arrayed himself with an unpopular people and against the woman he loved.

Colonel Sylvestre was on his feet now, his face purple with anger. "Mr. Moderator," he cried, "I regard this as an insult to Mr. Lemmerman and to this audience. This is no place for theatrical conversions. I move the adjournment of this meeting."

"Mr. Moderator," said Stephen, in a ringing voice, "there has always been, since the days of the apostles, a fitting place for such noble scenes as this, and that is at the waters of baptism. We will repair there immediately, and to this end I second Colonel Sylvestre's motion for an adjournment."

An adjournment it was indeed, for I believe that all, with the exception of Colonel Sylvestre and Horatio Lemmerman, went to the stream with Stephen and Mr. Vincent.

As my brother stepped down into the water I followed him, and slipped my hand into his. "I want to go first, Stephen," I said.

He had been under a great strain for several days, and his mind was, naturally, much engrossed. For a moment

he looked as if he did not comprehend my meaning. Then a great gladness broke over his face.

"Dear old Joe!" he whispered; and again our lives were united and again our dreams were one.

There, standing in the stream, he took my confession—the confession of my honest but hot and wayward boyish heart. My eyes fill at that memory, and I can scarcely see the page on which I try to write. I have often, in hasty speech and action, dishonored the Lord I confessed that day, but I can say, after all these years, that the central purpose of my life has been true, even as it was true that day.

After he had baptized me, Stephen led Mr. Vincent down into the water and baptized him, and we three walked home together, while the audience dispersed, and the three of us sang together, softly:

"How happy are they
Who their Saviour obey."

"I hope you will make our home yours while you stay in this neighborhood," said my mother, hospitably. "I suppose you will scarcely feel at home with the Sylvestres after this."

"Scarcely," said Cady Vincent, smiling. He thanked my mother warmly for her kindness, but said no more about the Sylvestres. One little incident I myself might have told. As we stood near the water, just before the baptisms, Rachel had come and held out her hand to Mr. Vincent.

"Do you want to say good-by?" she asked. "You can not be father's friend after this, you know."

"But can I not be yours, Rachel?" he asked. The two were close beside me, and I could not but hear the words.

“You are too just a woman to refuse friendship to a man because he follows his conscience.”

Rachel lowered her eyes, then raised them again. “You are a brave man,” she said. “I admire your courage, but I do not like your cause.”

She turned away, and I looked after her in pity. My heart was full of gentleness to-day, and my resentment against Rachel was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRE.

“Bro. Cady,” as we learned to call him, remained in our home over the next day, and he and Stephen talked over plans for the future. I gathered that the young minister whose sudden change of faith had so surprised us, was in easy circumstances, and in no way dependent upon his pulpit labors for a support. This was well; for those who preached the “ancient gospel,” as they used to call it, did it without money and without price. They must, therefore, either be of independent means, or be compelled to labor with their hands for each day’s bread.

I wish to say, however, in justice to Bro. Cady, that if the latter alternative had presented itself to him, he would have accepted it without a moment’s hesitation. Worldly considerations weigh little when put into the scale with a great conviction.

I saw at once that Stephen had conceived a great admiration for this man. There were many reasons for this. He had taught him the new faith, and it is evermore the way of the teacher to love the one to whom he has imparted the great lesson of his life. Especially is this true when in most things the pupil is wiser and more experienced than his teacher. Bro. Cady was not a learned man, but he was what is nowadays called “cultured.” If he were a young minister of our day, he would be in demand to read “papers” at all the literary clubs that our Maude Arrondale is so fond of attending. He always had an appropriate verse of poetry at his tongue’s end, and could quote it with such feeling that you seemed to get a new meaning out of it, however familiar it might be. His ac-

complishments were of just the kind to charm Stephen, who felt so keenly that he belonged to the backwoods, and had missed the elegances of life.

Another thing that appealed to Stephen strongly was, that Cady had given up his chance of winning Rachel for the sake of the gospel. Stephen had done the same thing, it is true, but not so openly and certainly. Besides, he chose to believe that his chance had been of the slightest, and that Cady's had amounted almost to a certainty.

"She must have learned in time to care for him," he told me once, long afterward. "He is of her world—the world she knew, and to which she naturally belonged."

But the affection between Cady and Stephen was not one-sided. The man of the world gave to the man of the woods the full tribute of gratitude and admiration. Stephen's was the stronger nature, and none knew it better than his new friend.

They would go together and preach as they had opportunity. This was the outcome of all their planning. Stephen was to introduce Cady to the little circle of churches to which he had been accustomed to minister, and assure them of his worthiness.

"The way will open," said Stephen, confidently. In this happy hope they rode away, their saddle-bags containing plenty of simple food from my mother's larder, and the single change of raiment apiece with which the preachers of that day thought it necessary to be prepared in case of a wayside baptism. Their Bibles they carried in their pockets or their hats, that they might bring them out and study as they rode. Father had business in Rocksford, and he decided to ride that far with the young preachers. I suspect that he wished to hear what Mr. Osburn and other of his own friends would say about the debate.

It was seldom that my mother and I were left in the house alone over night, and perhaps that is why I remember so distinctly all the incidents of that evening. The wind was high, and had a threatening sound. I know that mother drew the curtains over the windows, took the green boughs out of the fireplace, and lighted a fire on the hearth of the front room. I was surprised at this, for usually we sat in the kitchen when there was no company.

"Are you cold?" I asked, fearing that she might be falling ill.

"Oh, no," she said, "but the wind sounds dreary, as if the fall were here. I believe I am always a little nervous when your father is away."

Dear mother! she was homesick for her gray-haired lover, and I both laughed at her and kissed her as I told her so.

We had a long, long talk that night. She told me how she thanked God that her prayers for me had been answered, and that I had followed Stephen into the kingdom.

"But I am not Stephen, nor shall I ever be," I said. "You must never expect me to be."

No matter what she said. It is only God and mothers whose faith in human nature is complete.

"Perhaps in a year or two you will be preaching the gospel, too," she said, with a great longing in her voice.

"No, mother," I told her, "I must be a humble scholar, not a teacher. I have not the aptitude for that, as Stephen has. Some one must stay here and help father, and I, who have no great gifts of any sort, am just the one for that."

She did not argue the point, but smoothed my hair as if she were satisfied. By and by she said:

"Mothers never get quite to the place where they have no anxiety about their children. Now I think of the time

when my boys will marry, and of the women who will help to make or spoil their futures. Of course, you are still too young to consider such matters" (I did not at all agree with my mother in this), "but Stephen must soon think of marrying. Sometimes I wonder if he has not already thought too much about Rachel for his own peace of mind."

I could not betray Stephen's secret, even to my mother; so I only said:

"Stephen does not meet many girls who are Rachel's equal in point of intelligence."

Mother looked at me with quick alarm. "I hope she has not spoiled *your* peace of mind," she said. "She is a smart, capable girl, and I love her in spite of her faults. But I can't help feeling that a godless woman will ruin any man's life. Bro. Cady escaped from her influence none too soon. Now he will make a useful man; and perhaps some good woman will make him a happy one."

(I ought to say that my mother had no conception of a happy life apart from marriage. Without a wife, though with the consolations of religion, a man might be submissive, even cheerful, but not, in the full sense, happy. This belief was one of the compliments she paid to her own married life.)

We talked so earnestly that we forgot all about the passage of time; and when the old clock in the kitchen struck twelve, we both sprang to our feet in surprise. It was long since my mother had kept such unseemly hours.

"We have had a good talk, anyway," she said. "Haven't we?"

For answer, I kissed her again, and as I did so I noted that look of girlishness which came over her face when she was very happy. Ah, what a mother Stephen and I had!

I went upstairs, but had only just begun to get ready for bed when I heard my mother calling:

“Oh, quick, quick, Joseph! Colonel Sylvestre’s house is on fire!”

I did not stop even to look in the direction of the fire. In a moment I was in the stable, loosening the halter of Queenie, my faithful little brown mare. I did not wait for a saddle, but flung myself on Queenie’s back and rode as for the lives of those in the house on the hill. As I passed the house, I saw my mother standing, with strained eyes, in the door.

But I saw at once that the danger was less terrible than she had supposed. The fire was not in the house, but in the stable. The wind blew away from the house, but toward the great barn where the harvests of the year were stored. I remembered, as I rode, how Colonel Sylvestre had warned us against a fire in this barn when we danced there years before.

As I approached the place, one wild, hoarse cry after another fell upon my ears. Could it be possible that there was some one in the burning stable?

“Rachel! Rachel! Come out, Rachel! You will be killed—oh, Rachel! Rachel!”

Colonel Sylvestre stood helplessly before the burning building, his arms outstretched toward it. He had dressed hurriedly, his feet and head were bare, and his long white hair was blown back by the wind. Before or since, I have never seen such a picture of hopelessness.

Catching sight of me, he ran and pulled at me, as if to hasten my actions. “Save her! save her! She is inside! Great God, man! Rachel is in that barn!”

Was he really calling upon the merciful God whom he had so long blasphemed? I suppose not, for in his mad-

ness he did not know what he said. I flung myself from Queenie's back, and ran toward the stable.

The smoke choked and blinded me, but just inside the door I felt myself firmly grasped. My heart cried out in thankfulness as I drew Rachel out into the air. It was some moments before she could speak, but she kept pointing back toward the stable.

"Is there some one in there still?" I kept asking. She shook her head, but still pointed to the stable.

"The poor horses!" she gasped at last. "I thought I could save them, but they would not come out!"

Then I knew what had happened. She had unfastened the horses, thinking they would find their own way out; but the poor creatures, in their terror, had only plunged into the smoke, to perish miserably.

"I could not have breathed in there another minute," she added; "I was groping my way to where I thought the door ought to be, when I found you."

It seemed entirely useless to enter the building again, but the look of horror in Rachel's eyes, when at last she opened them wide, drove me to the attempt. She was ever a lover of animals, and the horses were her especial pride. If they had still been fastened in their stalls, I might possibly have been able to lead them out one by one; but poor Rachel's bravery seemed to have made their rescue quite out of the question.

I took a long breath and plunged in, trying to keep my bearings and to follow the pitiful neighs of the horses. Again and again I thought I must turn back, but at last I found one of the animals, wound my hands into his mane, and tried to speak. I was sure from the height that it must be Dolly, Rachel's spirited little saddle-horse, and I thought she might know my voice. I do not know to this

day how I got out of that building, much less how I got Dolly out with me. Rachel came flying to meet me.

“I thought I had sent you to your death,” she cried. “Didn’t you hear me calling? It seemed as if you would never come.”

A strange weakness had come over me, and for a moment it seemed that I could not rally myself for further exertion. Just then my mother came riding up the lane on one of the farm horses. I realized at once what she had done. The women of those days were equal to emergencies; and my mother had been out to rouse the neighbors and tell them of the fire.

There were not many neighbors, but those who came were soon at work, and, my faintness past, I found myself able to work with them.

There was little to be done. The house was not in any real danger, for it was at a considerable distance from the stable, and, as I have said, the wind was blowing the sparks in the opposite direction. But the great barn was threatened every moment, and we had no means of fighting fire. We half-dozen men did what we could with buckets and wet blankets, but I felt from the beginning that it was hopeless. Now that Rachel was safe, the Colonel had regained his composure, and directed our work, in his old tone of authority. Once, when I was near him, however, I noticed that he was shaking from head to foot, whether from cold or excitement I could not judge.

I proposed that the wagons and farming implements, which were stored in the great barn, be removed. While we were busy with this work, a cry from the women on the steps caused us to look out at the straw stacks. They were on fire, and in a moment the fire had spread to the barn.

The work of destruction was swift. Already the stable was in ruins, and the big barn, containing the harvests of the year, seemed to blaze up in a dozen places at once. There was nothing more to be done. I joined the women on the porch, and waited for the flames to do their work.

"Have you any idea how the fire started?" I asked of Rachel.

"I can only guess," she said. "Father smokes a great deal in the stable, when he is about his chores. He would never let his hired men do this, but lately he has grown careless. Last night, I remember, he had his pipe when he went to the barn, and it seemed to me afterward that he came in without it."

She was quiet and controlled, although her lips were white. In truth, Rachel usually seemed to me too controlled and self-possessed for a woman. I had liked her better a little while before, when she had come to meet me with a cry of gladness at my escape. Moments like that one were what kept me in the faith that, under all, Rachel had a human heart.

Presently she slipped away, and she and my mother busied themselves inside the house. We saw the rafters of the big barn crash in, and the huge timbers quiver and fall. Then there was nothing left upon which the fire could feed itself, and it slowly died down, until there was left only a smoking heap of ruins.

Then Rachel came and called us in. The table was spread out, and laden with good things. "You are all going home tired," she said, almost merrily, "but you must not go home hungry. I insist that you eat an early breakfast with us before you leave."

I hesitated, for in those days I had a stubborn pride, and Bro. Cady had told Stephen and me how Colonel Sylvestre had forbidden Rachel to speak to the Arrondales. I

felt that I could not partake of his hospitality under the circumstances.

Rachel came to the door again. "Why don't you come in, Joseph?" she asked.

I was a hot-headed youngster, and I told her what I had heard.

"You are a very foolish fellow," she said. "You will risk your life for us, but you will not eat in our house! Your brother would have better sense."

That was true. Stephen would say I was behaving very foolishly. For his sake I went in and ate my breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

The next I heard from the Sylvestres, the Colonel was very ill. Ross Turner drove up in his fine new buggy and imparted this information. The old man had taken cold from exposure on the night of the fire, and on the following day had gone to bed. Rachel had been caring for him night and day.

It seemed strange that five days should have been allowed to pass, since the fire, without any effort on our part to learn of the welfare of our neighbors, especially just after such a calamity had befallen them. But my father was a driving farmer, and he had come home from Rocksford full of enterprise. The fences must be mended and the sheds put into good condition for the winter. So I had little time at my own disposal.

I will admit, however, that there was another reason. My boyish pride was still at work, and I thought that after all that had happened, the advances should come from the Sylvestres.

Turner leaned over the dashboard and looked confidential. "If the old man should die now, I suppose Rachel would get it all."

I suppressed a desire to cut him across the mouth with his own buggy-whip, and merely said:

"I'm sure I don't know anything about it."

"It ain't likely he'd do anything for Martha, after the way she has acted. Now, I wouldn't so much mind Martha. A little too pious, maybe, but that ain't the worst thing in the world, 'specially in a woman. But Rachel! She'd lead a man a life of it, now, wouldn't she, Joe?"

She'd just set her little foot down on a fellow's neck, and keep it there for a lifetime. Have you any idea how much there is, Joe?"

"How much is there of what?" I asked sulkily.

"How much the old man is worth?"

"Not the least idea in the world."

"That's very strange, when you've lived by him so long. But Rachel is a queer one. A fellow don't like her, and yet he can't keep away from her. I don't like her, and I've always liked Arabel. There's a girl one can have a little fun with, and not be everlastingly put down and domineered over. But old man Sylvestre has got a pretty pile of money—there ain't no denyin' that."

I was glad when the selfish scamp drove away. I walked over to the Sylvestres, and found Rachel looking more worried than I had ever seen her. I condemned myself mercilessly when I saw the cares which had settled down upon her. There was no man about the place, and though there was no stock to care for, yet there was wood and water to be brought and many errands to be done. Her father was in bed and seemed almost helpless.

I busied myself about the place for a little while, and then went in to ask if I could be of service to the sick man.

Rachel shook her head. I more than suspected that her father was a difficult invalid.

"I can manage very well," she said. "There is no immediate danger, but the shock has been great and he needs a long rest. But there is something that you can do for me, Joseph. It is a great deal to ask, but there is no one else of whom I *can* ask it. Can you get the word to Martha, and ask her to come home?"

I suppose my surprise showed itself in my face. At any rate, Rachel knew very well what was in my mind.

"Father has consented," she said quickly. "He imagines himself dying, and I told him that Martha must come."

I had learned long before that this slim young woman was a mistress of diplomacy. How she had managed the old man no one ever knew; but I suppose she had allowed his fears of death to run riot until his resentment weakened and his natural parental affection asserted itself.

"I will go to Rocksford to-day, and bring Martha home with me," I said, with boyish eagerness.

Rachel's manner at once became chilly, and I realized that I had made a mistake. "There is no such need of haste," she said, in her most formal tone. "Mr. and Mrs. Osburn would bring her home, if they knew she was needed. Perhaps Ross Turner would go, if I should ask him."

If she should ask him! She should *not* ask anything of that mercenary scoundrel. I hastened to put on my most humble manner, and to assure my lady that I would ride over to Rocksford, see Mr. and Mrs. Osburn, and ask them to bring Martha home as soon as convenient.

Then I departed, feeling much like a worm of the dust. It was thus that I usually felt after an interview with Rachel Sylvestre.

Queenie and I had a fine ride together. The woods were in their autumn glory, and the air had that frosty nip which is better than a tonic. Here and there I reined up beside the fence to talk to some farmer who was at work in the clearing. Ah! those great fires of log and brush, in which so much of the glorious timber of this country was consumed! They were a part of the price of civilization, and civilization always comes high.

I was almost within sight of Rocksford when I was joined by another rider, a lightly built young man—I guessed him at twenty-eight, though he might have been

much more—well dressed, and with the suggestion of conscious superiority about him.

We passed the time of day, after the manner of travelers in that time, and we rode on together. His name, he said, was Charles Easton. He had come to Rocksford recently from New York, and was thinking of investing in land and settling in the vicinity.

“The people hereabouts have made a mistake in beginning life in such a narrow way,” he said. “They have allowed the land to be cut up into small farms, instead of keeping it in tracts large enough to be farmed with real profit. I have been managing several thousand acres, so these clearings look rather small to me.”

“We poor folks have to farm what we can get,” I said. “Besides, with no markets within reach, there would be no special profit in large farming.”

We argued the matter for some moments. He was not convinced, nor was I, and perhaps that was one reason why we never liked each other. Possibly I have confused later impressions with those of that first meeting, but it seems to me in the recollection that I always disliked Charles Easton, always listened with distrust to his assertions concerning himself.

Yet I can not tell why. His face had not the strength of Stephen's nor the refinement of Bro. Cady's, but certainly it was not unmistakably coarse. He was boastful, but not offensively so—not more so, indeed, than many well-intentioned men I knew. It is hard for me to tell why I disliked him. Perhaps it was because I saw that he had set me down as a backwoods gawky. That would have been a convincing reason.

He asked me where I came from, and when I told him what neighborhood it was, he at once inquired about Colonel Sylvestre.

"I know some of his friends in New York State," he said. "I must pay my respects to him, and ask his advice in placing my investments."

I opened my mouth to tell him of the Colonel's misfortune and illness, and of my errand to Rocksford; then caution interposed and I kept still. He was no acquaintance of the Sylvestres, and was entitled to no confidence concerning them.

We were at the Osburns by this time, and my new acquaintance and I parted company. Mr. Osburn was away from home, but his wife received me hospitably, and was both pleased and anxious when I told her my story.

"Martha must go home at once," she said. "We can not risk the chance that the old man may change his mind. The poor girl suffers greatly through feeling herself shut out from her home. I doubt if she will be any happier there than here, but we could never forgive ourselves if the chance for a reconciliation were lost. Besides, there is another reason." The good woman looked worried. "A man named Easton has been staying about these parts lately, and has done everything possible to engage Martha's interest. He even attends our little meetings, though I hear he sneers at the teaching when he is with the worldly. So far as I can learn, Martha has accepted no attention from him, but he visits much at the school and seems determined to see as much of her as possible. I shall feel better when she is back among her own people. She is too young and too beautiful to be alone."

I was alarmed at once. There could be nothing in common between Martha and this man, yet no one can guess where the heart of an innocent, trusting girl will fasten itself. I began to wish, with Mrs. Osburn, that she was back with her own people—that is to say, with Rachel.

Mrs. Osburn insisted that I remain over night. In the morning she would drive Martha home, under my escort. I did not see how even the fastidious Rachel could object to this; and so I stayed.

After supper I went over to the home of Martha's teacher, with whom she lived. Martha herself met me at the door. I think my coming aroused her anxiety, for she at once inquired after her father and Rachel.

"And I am to go—to go *home*?" she asked, with a pitiful emphasis upon the word. I realized at that moment how bitterly she had felt her exile.

"Mrs. Osburn will go with you to-morrow," I told her. "Do not feel anxious about your father. Rachel assured me that there is no cause for anxiety. They both need you and want you—that is all."

"Rachel wrote me about the fire," she said. "It was so good of you to save dear old Dolly."

"Oh, that was nothing at all," I said. "Your sister's risk was far greater than mine." Still, it was pleasant to be praised by Martha.

I had hoped a little to find Stephen in Rocksford, but he and Bro. Cady had stopped but for a night, and then had hastened on to the county-seat of the next county, where they were to hold what was called, in the speech of the brethren, "a meeting of days."

The next day we started for home as soon as it was light. I had just helped Martha, in my awkward fashion, to mount her horse, when Mr. Charles Easton came up.

"Miss Sylvestre!" he exclaimed. "How near I came to letting you get away without a parting word! I am distressed indeed to learn of your father's illness. And how unfortunate that you should be called from your studies just at this time!"

"I am very glad indeed to go home to my father and sister," said Martha, in her sweet, serious way. "I am sure my sister needs me, although she would never say so. I have been away for a long time, and she has had a heavy burden."

I watched her narrowly as she told Charles Easton good-by. If he was in reality her lover, she seemed entirely unconscious of it. She held out her hand, and he bent over it with what I considered (being myself a backwoods boy) an entirely unnecessary display of gallantry. But Martha, I fancy, would have thought it unwomanly to judge any man her suitor until he had avowed himself such.

"I shall come to see your father as soon as he is sufficiently recovered to receive visitors," he told her. "May I not trust you to let me know when that time comes?"

"You can ask Mrs. Osburn," Martha said, looking into his face with frank simplicity. "She is sure to keep informed of father's condition."

Mr. Easton's jaunty manner seemed to be a trifle subdued by this innocent speech, but he said good-by with proper grace. Then we rode away, Martha and I to breathe in together the intoxication of nature and the spirit of youth.

Martha Sylvestre was a creature fashioned for happiness. Birds and sunshine belonged within her soul. But her affections dominated her, and failure and loss there meant quick misery. To be loved and to serve those she loved meant not only happiness, but freedom—the power to be herself and to express herself naturally. To-day she was herself, for she was going home.

Good Mrs. Osburn, too, was happy. The thought of Mr. Easton's attentions to Martha had distressed her, and she was glad to turn the girl over to Rachel. For, what-

ever Rachel's failings might be, she was certainly an irreproachable guardian.

So we made a merry party, and I think even the frisky squirrels may have hastened their steps to listen to our laughter that morning.

Rachel came down the lane to meet us, and Martha slipped from her saddle and threw herself into her sister's arms. I believe I have said somewhere that I am not what is called emotional, but at that moment I felt like a woman, and a hysterical woman at that.

Rachel kissed Martha and smoothed her hair for a moment; then she loosened the girl's arms, and came to where I stood. I remember that I was foolishly playing with the bridle of my horse, and trying to choke back the big lump in my throat.

"Thank you, Joseph," she said. There was the old comradeship of our school days in her voice, the old friendliness in her eyes. I wondered how matters would fare in the future between the Sylvestres and the Arrondales.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNWILLING SACRIFICE.

For several days I went to the Sylvestres daily, and did such little services as came in my way. Then the Colonel began to creep about again, and I thought it prudent to remain away.

However, mother went frequently, and brought home tidings. The Colonel was not his old self. He seemed almost fiercely anxious to be well, and to resume his old duties, but he wearied easily, and was irritated when any one seemed to notice his weakness. Mentally, too, he had failed. Often he lost himself, and was obliged to leave the most casual remark unfinished. He seemed to realize this and to be especially annoyed by it; for he had been particularly proud of his conversational powers.

Mother reported that he seemed to treat Martha as if nothing unpleasant had occurred; but it soon became evident that he meant to deny her all religious privileges. She never came to any of the meetings of the brethren and sisters, though it was plain enough from her eager inquiries that she had lost none of her interest. I knew that she could not have counted upon this deprivation when she had returned to her home so gladly, and that she must feel it sorely.

Once, the only time she and I were alone together that winter, she told me how glad she was that I had "obeyed the gospel." (I have loved this quaint Scripture phrase from that day. Martha's speech on every-day subjects was unusually simple and childlike, but she fell easily into

the language of the sanctuary when she talked on religion.)

"I am so glad," she repeated, with sweet earnestness. "It is a step you will never regret. I can not tell you what the precious promises are to me. So long as I have my Bible, there is cheer and comfort, whatever comes." Then she blushed a little, as if she had been surprised into speaking of herself too freely.

"I'm glad, too, Martha," I said. "I believe the Bible, and I want to stand for what it teaches. But I'm not a very good sort of fellow. I'm hot-blooded and impatient, and frequently I have feelings that are not at all like a Christian. As often as once a week, for instance, I want to thrash Ross Turner."

Martha's merry little laugh rang out. "You will never again care to thrash Ross Turner," she said. "He is going to be married."

"Going to be married! To whom?"

"To Arabel Holcomb, of course. Who else would marry *him*?"

"Not Rachel, certainly," I ventured. I had never before known that Martha's delicate little nose could be tilted exactly like her sister's. But the present experiment in that direction was a perfect success.

Martha was right. Within a week, Ross and Arabel drove to Rocksford together in the new buggy, and returned a wedded pair. It was a satisfaction to know that the vacillations of this foolish fellow were at last ended. I may as well say right here that Martha's prophecy proved true, and that I never again had the slightest temptation to thrash Ross Turner. He was entirely safe with Arabel, and there I was content to leave him.

As I have intimated, I saw Martha alone but once, in the winter that followed her return. I merely caught a

glimpse of her now and then, when I went to the house on an errand; for their father's semi-invalidism kept both of the girls closely confined at home. In the early spring, my mother told me it was generally believed that Martha was preparing to be married to Charles Easton.

"Martha!" I exclaimed. "Why, Martha is only—" I stopped short. I had started to say that Martha was only a child. But in that moment I realized that she was a woman and had the right to choose.

But had she not, too, the right to *know*? My old, instinctive dislike of Easton overswept me again. It was horrible that this pure creature should give herself to a man of whose past she knew nothing. I was only a boy myself, and a boy of singularly limited experience; yet I had distrusted the man. Why had not Martha been warned by a similar intuition?

Strangely enough, the only person to whom I thought of going with my burden of soul was my old enemy. Rachel was Martha's care-taker and second mother. Rachel could always bring things about. I would go to Rachel.

That very evening, I saw Martha drive by with Easton. I walked over at once, and found Rachel alone. She received me kindly, but seemed, I thought, extremely sad.

I had hoped to lead up to my errand gently, but no opportunity offered itself. So I was obliged to begin boldly and bluntly.

"Rachel," I said, "we were children together, and I have no sisters. Do you remember how you enraged me once by calling me your little brother, when I was half a head taller than you? I want to be your little brother again for half an hour—your naughty, meddlesome little brother. I have always let you scold me—you may scold me as much as you please when I am done. I want you to talk to me about Martha and Charles Easton."

She raised her beautiful eyes and searched my face. "What do you know about them?" she asked.

"I know nothing. I hear they are going to be married."

"Why do you ask questions?"

"I promised to let you scold me after I am done. But tell me first what I want to know."

"What do you want to know?"

"Whether your father or any of his friends have had previous knowledge of Mr. Easton—whether you know him to be the kind of man who will make Martha happy."

Rachel shrugged her shoulders. "Happiness is an uncertain quantity," she said. "How can we tell what kind of man will make any woman happy?"

"Don't bandy words, Rachel. If you know Mr. Easton to be a man of character and responsibility, I have nothing to say. I told you in the beginning that I had come to be meddlesome."

Again she looked into my face searchingly. "Have you heard anything against him?" she asked.

"Not one thing. I will tell you the whole truth, and then your sense of justice will at once be up in rebellion. It is simply that I do not fancy Mr. Easton—that I *feel* he is not worthy of Martha."

The mask lifted from her face, and her anxiety and doubt looked out upon me. "I feel so too," she said. "But I have not a particle of reason. And we must be just, Joseph—we must not misjudge this man."

Somewhat reluctantly I agreed with her. I was not, to tell the truth, so much concerned about doing justice to Charles Easton as I was about Martha's chances for happiness. I wanted to say, "Does she love him?" but such a question would be meddling indeed, and Rachel would probably be prompt to resent it.

“Father is greatly set upon this matter,” Rachel went on. “I never saw him so set upon anything. You know he has never felt quite at home in this country, and he likes every one who brings the air of the East with him.”

“Yes, he intended to marry you to Bro. Cady,” I said, with my customary bluntness.

Rachel reddened and ignored the interruption.

“Mr. Easton brought excellent letters of introduction from prominent persons in Albany—persons of whom my father knows, though he is not personally acquainted with any of them. Martha met Mr. Easton first in Rocksford, and he seemed to be received without any question there. I suppose he was attracted to Martha, even then.” He came here soon after she returned, and almost immediately made his wishes known to my father. Father did not tell me at once, but when I knew—”

She stopped short, but the compression of her lips and the swelling of the veins upon her forehead told me with what strength she had opposed her father’s will. But for once her opposition had been in vain.

“And Martha?” I asked, feeling that her confidence gave me an opportunity to speak. “How does she feel about it all?”

Rachel looked troubled. I knew that her longing for some one to share her anxiety was battling with her lifelong habit of reserve. It was agony to speak the secrets of her sister’s heart, and yet she spoke.

“I do not think Martha wishes for the marriage. She is timid by nature, and she is frightened at the thought of giving her life to one who is almost a stranger. But she is tractable and yielding by instinct—not at all like me.” And Rachel laughed a sad little laugh. “She says that when she—when she was baptized, she had decided that that was the one thing a child might do against the wishes

of a parent. And, even in that, she suffered more than any of us knew."

I nodded, remembering the look of exile in Martha's eyes when I saw her at Rocksford.

"She says she can not disobey again. She has begged father to let her wait, but he has grown strangely impatient. Mr. Easton urges haste, and father tells Martha that, if she refuses to obey him, he will send her away and never take her back again."

Then something happened that I never expected to see. Rachel bowed her head upon her hands and burst into tears.

"Don't be alarmed, Joe," she said—again came the sad little smile—"I don't do this more than once a year."

"Oh, don't mind that," I begged, and added, with quite unnecessary candor, "I am so relieved to think you do it at all!"

She did not mind. "I must not do this man an injustice," she said again. "I know absolutely nothing of him that is discreditable."

"Is there nothing discreditable in the fact that he wishes to hurry an inexperienced girl into a marriage that would be distasteful to her?" I demanded hotly. "If he were half a man, he would not want so cheap a victory. He would have her heart or nothing at all."

Rachel looked at me in some surprise, as if she would say, "Whence this sudden acquisition of wisdom? Who taught *you* where real victory lies?" But she said nothing and I rose to go.

"Is there nothing to be done?" I asked—"nothing to prevent this sacrifice?"

"I know of nothing. You may be interested in knowing"—now, for the first time, it was the scornful, bitter Rachel who spoke—"you *will* be interested in knowing

that Mr. Easton has promised Martha perfect freedom in the exercise of her religious convictions."

I made a wry face. "I shall be interested in knowing," I said, speaking bitterly in my turn, "that he keeps any of the promises he makes to her."

Then I went away, for Rachel's nervousness warned me that Easton and Martha were liable to return at any moment.

I wrote to Stephen, urging him to make careful inquiry in Rocksford concerning Easton, and to let me know at once what he learned. He did so, and came home to bring the result of his investigations.

They were very meager. Easton had brought letters of introduction, had used money freely, had done nothing especially reprehensible while he stayed in Rocksford. Yet substantial men, like Mr. Osburn, thoroughly distrusted him. There was much that we could feel and guess, but nothing that we could carry to Colonel Sylvestre with any hope of influencing him.

Stephen took the news of the approaching marriage to heart deeply. "It is too terrible to think of," he said—"far more terrible, to my mind, than death. A sanctified soul and an unsanctified marriage—what could be worse than that? And the worst of all is that the poor child will do this unholy thing in the name of conscience—will believe that in obeying her father, she is honoring her God. I must see her—I must warn her. It can not be too late."

I had never seen Stephen so aroused. He paced the floor excitedly for an hour, trying to think how he could get speech with Martha. To go to her home was quite out of the question. Neither the Colonel nor Rachel could be trusted to give him welcome.

Quite unexpectedly, the coveted opportunity presented itself. At the announcement that Stephen was at home

came the demand that he should preach that night in the schoolhouse, and Martha came to the service. My mother was greatly encouraged to see her there, but my own heart sank, for I judged her presence there to be an earnest of her anticipated liberty.

Stephen walked home with her, and I sat up to wait his return. He came up to the little chamber which we still shared whenever he was at home, and I read disappointment in his face.

“It was quite useless,” he said, dropping down wearily upon the bed. “But what a ghastly sacrifice! I tried to tell her, but I could not make it plain enough. The child has fixed in her mind the idea that in a matter of religion alone one has the right to refuse obedience to parents. I tried to explain to her that marriage is a matter of religion, that marriage without love is a sin against the God who gave us the gift of life. She shed some bitter tears, but at the last she would only say that her word was given and she must keep it. She has never known what love is. That is one comfort; she is not sinning against a knowledge of what love really means.”

I looked at him closely.

“Are you sure,” I asked—I would try to save her at any cost—“that Martha does not love *you*?”

“Me!” he cried; and then he groaned aloud. “Oh, no, no, no! You can not mean it. God grant that it may not be so!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE WEDDING FEAST.

In April, Charles Easton and Martha were married. At the command of the Colonel there was a great wedding, and even the despised Arrondales were honored with an invitation.

As an amazing concession made in honor of her crowning act of daughterly obedience, Martha was allowed to choose the minister who should officiate on this occasion. Some instinct must have told her that Stephen would refuse, for she did not ask him, glad as she would no doubt have been to make the reconciliation between the two families thus public. But she chose Bro. Cady, and thus that true gentleman was once more brought beneath the same roof with the woman whom he had once wooed so ardently.

"How do you like being a Campbellite?" Rachel asked him, as she held out her hand.

He smiled upon her with brave, kind eyes that had in them not a hint of resentment. "So well," he said, "that I would that thou were both almost and altogether such as I am."

She was not vexed; and I fell to wondering whether this fact argued that she did or that she did not care for Bro. Cady.

Rachel was the life of the company, and only I, of all the number, guessed what a heavy heart she bore.

The bride was as lovely as a bride could be, and if she seemed more shrinking and quiet than usual, it seemed but

natural in one so young, forced into the central position on an occasion of great ceremony.

I must say that Charles Easton acquitted himself well. His manner was triumphant, as might have been expected, but his cordiality was without the slightest appearance of condescension, and most of those who had been doubtful of him went away with a sincere admiration for him. Even Bro. Cady said that he had underrated the man, and that he now thought Martha might be very happy with him.

As for Stephen, Rachel and I, we kept our thoughts to ourselves.

Mr. Easton told us that he had intended to make heavy purchases of land this spring, but that Colonel Sylvestre had prevailed upon him and Martha to remain in the old home for at least a year. He did not seem especially pleased over the prospect; indeed, he said it was a disappointment to him not to be able to carry his bride at once to a home of their own.

But the Colonel was more than gratified at the idea of having his son-in-law with him, and waxed eloquent over it, quite in the old, pompous fashion.

"My son-in-law has submitted himself to my advice in the matter," he said, "albeit, perhaps, to his own disadvantage. But having no son to direct my affairs, it is most convenient to lean upon Charles, until my health shall be somewhat more fully restored."

I noticed that Martha did not say "Charles," as her father did. She called her husband "Mr. Easton," as if she were addressing a distinguished stranger. On the other hand, he said, "My love" to her, as if he were in a novel. We simple Blue Brook people thought this very questionable taste—being used to a kind of love that is chary of possessive pronouns.

Easton kept his promise to Martha, so far as allowing her to attend religious meetings was concerned. She came quite regularly to our little gatherings, and, on those rare occasions when we had a speaker from abroad, her husband usually came with her.

"Perhaps she will bring him in," said my mother, who was always looking for a Pentecost.

Perhaps she would; but it struck me that Martha herself did not expect it.

There came that year a kind of readjustment in our religious community. There had once been a small Baptist church, not far from my home. To this my mother had belonged, from the time of its organization. When she left it, several others left also, going to cast their lot with the little circle of those who rejected all creeds save the one divinely given. Thus weakened, the Baptists had found it difficult to keep together and at work; and for a year or more had met only irregularly. The debate had turned the minds of many away from the difficulties of a Calvinistic theology and toward the plain teaching of the word of God. One after another among the Baptists began to inquire why their name and creed might not be cast away, and their forces joined with those of the people known simply as "disciples."

A visit from Stephen and Bro. Cady, just at this time, hastened the happy consummation. They were to hold what was vaguely called, in the shibboleth of the brethren, "a meeting of days," and were discussing the possibility of securing the town hall. Hearing of this, the officers of the Baptist Church came forward and placed their meeting-house at the disposal of the evangelist, and urging that there be no differences among us, but that henceforth the Lord's people walk by the same rule and mind the same thing.

It was a happy time for the little band of those who sought New Testament Christianity. Stephen had begun by this time to keep a very slight diary, which he called his "preaching-book." It contained little more than the names of the places where he preached, with his text and now and then a brief outline. But to me the little old leather-covered book is full of romance, for it brings our youth back again. I find in it a few notes referring to this meeting of which I have spoken. A liberal deduction must always be made for Stephen's modesty, in anything quoted from him. He was ever inclined to underrate himself and to put others forward. Of Bro. Cady, in particular, he had an exalted opinion, as I have already said. Yet I distinctly remember that of these two good men, Stephen was the favorite in our little community. The home-grown prophet was not without honor in Blue Brook.

Stephen was a fine singer and the people were fond of the stirring hymns he taught them. I remember one of which they never seemed to tire:

"Our bondage here will end
By and by, by and by;
Our bondage here will end
By and by.

"Our bondage here will end
With our threescore years and ten,
And vast glory crown the day
By and by."

Bro. Cady used to criticise this hymn, and to say that "end" and "ten" did not rhyme properly; but Stephen always laughed at him, and told him that he should have remained in the East, where correct rhymes are of more importance than the spirit and the understanding.

"The hymn has a noble roll," he used to say, "and it can be sung without hymn-books, which is the thing of greatest importance, in my way of thinking."

Here are some of the extracts from Stephen's little diary:

AUGUST 14.—Meeting in Blue Brook Baptist Church. Baptist brethren anxious to drop all party distinctions and be known as Christians or disciples only. Would that the same spirit prevailed everywhere! Preached from I. Cor. ii. 2: "For I was determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Tried to urge that all put aside non-essential doctrines and unite in the service of Jesus Christ. Joseph led in public prayer for the first time. This gave my mother great joy. Two confessions.

AUGUST 15.—Bro. Cady preached an admirable sermon on "The Love of God." His doctrinal strength is in correcting the evils of Calvinism, and his arguments to-night seemed to me unanswerable. Many expressed themselves as pleased and satisfied. I gave a short exhortation at the close of the sermon, and two more came forward.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 17.—A day to be remembered. Our Baptist brethren met with us around the Lord's table, and we agreed henceforward to be one people. The sin of sectarianism seems to me so appalling that I must give my life to combat it. Why set up barriers which our Lord himself never set up, and keep God's people, in a community like this, from uniting to oppose the great enemy of souls? In the morning Bro. Cady preached and I exhorted. In the evening I preached and he followed. His subject this morning was, "The Healing Touch of Jesus." Mine to-night was, "The Truth that Makes Us Free." One confession at each service.

AUGUST 18.—Preached on "The Simplicity of the Kingdom"—"not with enticing words of man's wisdom," etc. Tried to show how little the intricacies of theology belong to the preaching of that gospel which is meant for every man, however humble and ignorant he may be. After the meeting a tall, bearded man came up and held

out his hand. It was a young Methodist preacher who once prayed for me at a camp-meeting. "I rejoice to know that the Lord heard my prayer in your behalf," he said. "He has indeed turned his face toward you." "He never turns his face away," I ventured to tell him. "It is we poor, willful mortals who go away from his love." I was perhaps tempted to admonish him to deal more in the spirit of that love, if he desired to convert the young men of our day; but thought better of it. No doubt he has learned many things already, and will learn many more if he continues to knock about this world until he is eighty years old.

He asked me if it is true that the Campbellites (as he called them) deny the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I did not believe at first that he could be asking the question seriously, but I soon found that he really inquired for information. I asked him if he had not heard that the Scriptures were our rule of faith and practice, and if he thought we could accept the authoritative teaching of the Scriptures and not accept their teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. It is strange that such wild statements about our position can be so readily believed.

AUGUST 22.—Closed our meeting of eight days, with sixteen souls added to the saved. Bro. Cady and I each preached a short sermon, exhorting the new converts to steadfastness. I should like to spend my life among these people, but duty calls elsewhere. Would that we might see many such triumphs of Christian love and loyalty over sectarian prejudice.

SEPTEMBER 24.—Visited Blue Brook again, and had the unspeakable privilege of sitting down with my loved ones at the Lord's table. M. was present with her husband. They invited me to take dinner with them, but I declined. Many outsiders were present. I can not but feel that the spirit of Christian fraternity, which has been demonstrated in this community, has greatly inclined the hearts of the people. Would that God's children everywhere might realize that oneness for which he prayed!

CHAPTER XXI.

WIFE AND MOTHER.

To almost every young man there comes a period of restlessness—a time when the monotony of his home life becomes suddenly intolerable to him. Often this follows his first great emotional experience, and is so much like a mania that the will seems powerless to shake it off.

I had always said that I would stay at home and help father. I had never considered any other plan of life. But in these last few months I had been able to put no heart or hope into the tasks which had hitherto satisfied me. I performed them mechanically, wished myself away from them, called myself a coward and again wished myself away.

Stephen saw my condition of mind, as I had seen his years before. He did not try to reason me out of it. He put his hand upon my shoulder and told me to go.

“Every boy needs to go away from his home at least once,” he said. “He needs to look at his own life from the outside. I can very well make my headquarters here, and help father when he is especially hard pressed. It is best that you should go.”

“But Rachel is here,” I said. “You will be obliged to see her often, and I know what pain that means.”

He scrutinized my face closely, as if he sought to find out how I knew. “Rachel and I are as far apart as the poles,” he said. “I have not struggled for nothing. You must go away.”

In my heart I knew that he was right, and I went. I saddled Queenie; made my way, through weary days

of travel, to the Ohio River, and found employment in hauling and rafting logs.

It was good work for me, though the surroundings were by no means such as my mother would have chosen. The men with whom I worked were rough fellows with little of real manliness about them. The work was laborious and monotonous, but it kept my mind employed, and taught me to look with a new respect to the farm tasks to which I had been accustomed from my childhood. Farm work was not the worst thing in the world, and it was worth something to have learned.

I found a little company of disciples, who had been gathered together and taught by Alexander Campbell. Their fellowship extended to me when I was a stranger, amidst uncongenial companions, was sweeter than anything I could have believed possible. They had no regular place of meeting, but held frequent services in the homes of their members. I have none but happy memories of those meetings, held in big, clean kitchens beside roaring log fires. There was no one in the number who was what we called "apt to teach," but we sang together and prayed together and read, turn about, long chapters in the Bible, evading the difficult proper names with such skill as we could command.

I was homesick, and I knew that homesickness was good for me. For the first time I knew that my own home was one in ten thousand.

My great delight, in those days, was in Stephen's letters. He wrote about all the affairs of the home and the neighborhood, going into particulars so carefully that I could almost see everything that he described. I wish I had preserved all of these letters. Here are two, thumbed with the many readings given it by a homesick boy:

BLUE BROOK, Oct. 27, 18—.

MY DEAR BROTHER:—We were glad to learn of your welfare, and especially to know that you have found a place and a welcome among the brethren. I suspect you of homesickness, but you have too good sense to be homesick for very long. Each one of us must take his little dose some time, and I know yours will be swallowed bravely.

Father and mother are very well. Father keeps busy and finds an odd job now and then for me. I have been away for but two days, and that was to pay a visit to Bro. Cady, who is preaching for a few days in W—. He is having a fine interest, and is doing a great deal to build up the cause. On the first night of his meeting he was introduced to a young lady who is an ardent Methodist, and who berated him soundly for his doctrine. "I hear you do not believe in the Holy Spirit," she told him. "Do you believe all you hear?" he asked her. And the lively young lady retorted, "I certainly don't believe all I hear from *you*." Bro. Cady was not in the least daunted, but asked if he might call on the young lady and explain our teaching to her. He did call, and, so far as I can judge, he continued to call daily. I told him to be careful, for a vivacious woman is never so interesting as when she tries to hold her own in an argument. "Oh, I am in no sort of danger," he assured me. But in the evening, when he introduced me to her, I decided that he *is* in some danger. She has big blue eyes and brown curls, and is the prettiest young woman I know, always excepting Martha.

[I instantly resented this judgment, and told myself that it was only half meant. If Rachel was not called a "pretty woman," it was only because that word seemed too small for her. She was indeed less lovely than Martha, but her face had an expressiveness and her figure a supple grace such as are seldom seen. And Stephen knew it very well.]

Colonel Sylvestre and his son-in-law gave a dance in the new barn last night. It is hinted that both Rachel and Martha strongly disapproved of it, and that they were

scarcely seen during the evening. Whisky flowed freely, and many of the young men were the worse for their dissipation. The Colonel does not care in the least for such company, nor, so far as I can judge, does Mr. Easton. Whatever he may be at heart, he has evidently been accustomed to associating with gentlemen. My only explanation of last night's carousal is, that they knew they were not held in favor hereabouts, and so made this attempt at a conciliation.

Another thought has come to me—one almost too horrible to be entertained. Is it possible that Easton likes to humiliate Martha, on account of her religious scruples? Perhaps I wrong him, but I can not help feeling that he is capable of it.

I met Ross Turner this morning in front of the blacksmith shop. He was the worse for last night, and very silly. "The son-in-law business is the business that brings in the money," he said. "Look at Easton, now! Just look at him! See how *he* has made it pay. But I never dreamed that the old man would take Martha back—now, did you?" I let him go without a word, for he was half drunk, and not worth the tongue-lashing that he deserved.

My heart bleeds for poor little Martha. It is strange that so good a girl could ever have so blinded her conscience as to consent to such a marriage. But she was young, and she had no mother.

It must be that she suffers. It can not be otherwise, with a nature as sensitive as hers. Contact with evil sends such a nature within itself, and to the endurance of unutterable agony.

I wonder what Rachel thinks. I have not seen her.

Father and mother ask to be affectionately remembered. Let us hear from you often.

Faithfully yours,

STEPHEN ARRONDALE.

The other letter was written six months later, and must have reached me just before I started home:

BLUE BROOK, March 2, 18—.

DEAR JOSEPH:—We are more than rejoiced to think you are coming home. To tell the truth, I think father considers that I make a poor substitute for you. "I thought Steve was the better farmer of the two, at the start," he said the other day, "but preaching has rather spoiled him. I shall be glad to get Joey back again." You know he is always in a soft-hearted mood when he talks about "Joey."

In truth, I have been at home very little for the past three months. The work seemed to call, and there was only me to go.

Last week I saw Bro. Cady for the first time in months. He told me he was soon to visit his family in Albany. In the course of our conversation I casually inquired the name of the young Methodist lady to whom he introduced me when I saw him last. I was ashamed of having forgotten, but there had been nothing in the meantime to recall it to my mind. "Her name *at present*," he said, with a peculiar smile, "is Elizabeth Mather." "At present," I said. "What do you mean by that?" "I mean," he said, "that I trust it will soon be Mrs. Cady." "You are going to marry her," I exclaimed, in real surprise—though I might have guessed. "But she is a Methodist," I objected. "No, she isn't," he said triumphantly. "I've brought her over."

So he is gone, and I shall miss my bachelor friend. But he will have a fine wife, and one who will keep him on his mettle.

I wonder if Rachel will care. She will give no sign, for her pride is a coat of mail. I fancy that she does not altogether like her brother-in-law. Of course, I do not know this, but on the two or three occasions when I have seen them together I thought her manner toward him very distant.

Martha has a little daughter. Easton called up "the boys" at the tavern yesterday, and treated them in honor of the event. I was passing at the time, and when I thought of the saintly young mother, my heart turned sick. What a profanation of the sanctity of parenthood!

Where will it all end? In heartache and heartbreak, I believe, as I have believed from the beginning.

We long for your coming. It will not be long until the time.

Affectionately yours,
STEPHEN.

I had been anxious to get away, but I was more than glad to get back. I felt sure that I should never go away again. I had no such gifts as Stephen's. I could hold my own in common toils, and home was the place for me.

I was surprised soon after my return, by a rather formal invitation to dine with the Eastons. Ordinarily, in our neighborhood, we "dropped in" to one another's houses, and ate meals wherever meals came in our way. The Sylvestres had always been more ceremonious than the rest, and had become much more so since the advent of Charles Easton.

The Colonel received me quite warmly, and even alluded to my services on the night of the fire. Easton shook my hand with the air of good fellowship, and I liked him less than ever.

Martha floated into the room presently, in a soft white gown, with her baby in her arms.

"I wanted Joseph to see our little Rachel," she said, looking shyly up into her husband's face.

I had never seen a young baby before, and I remember I was greatly surprised that it was such a tiny thing. But something in its helplessness sent a strange thrill to my heart, and I said, quite honestly:

"It is beautiful!"

It was not the little lace-decked baby that was beautiful, though. It was the new look on Martha's face.

CHAPTER XXII.

CLOUDS AND CARES.

One evening Stephen returned from Rocksford with a strange story. It had just come to light—so Mr. Osburn told him—that Charles Easton owed large sums of money there. Some of the debts had been contracted before his marriage, but in all cases he had, since that date, given new notes, with his father-in-law's name added to his own. None of his creditors were impatient, but some had begun to ask questions, wondering why it was that a man with means at command for large investments should continue to accumulate debts.

“Debts,” in those days, meant something quite different from what they mean now. The demands for ready money were few, and the amount in circulation small. People did not borrow money to advance great business enterprises. To be in debt meant in a certain measure to be in disgrace.

The fact that money had been so freely loaned to Charles Easton by these men was a kind of recognition of the fact that he belonged to another world than theirs. Something in the easy swing of his manner seemed to say that he would naturally need to handle a good deal of money.

But where was the money he had meant to invest? Stephen and I decided that it had never existed.

This was not the whole story. Mr. Osburn and others told Stephen that Easton's record in Rocksford, during the time of his courtship, had been correct enough. He had seemed to have no employment, but this was excused

on the assumption that he was a man of means, looking about for a place to put his capital. He had seemed to be a man of the world, and some persons had expressed surprise that he should be drawn to a woman so intensely religious as Martha, but in reality there was nothing strange about this. Martha's beauty of face and charm of manner were quite sufficient to account for the attraction. That her father's property was also an attraction, we were but just beginning to guess.

But since his marriage, his manner, on his occasional visits to Rockford, had been altogether different. He had fallen in with some men of questionable reputation, and went to their houses to drink and play cards. This was the more noteworthy because, in our own neighborhood, he held himself aloof from this class of persons. He did, indeed, "treat" freely, but he always avoided bringing those to whom he dispensed favors to a social equality with himself. In Rockford, however, some restraint seemed to be withdrawn, and he allowed himself free rein.

But that upon which Stephen's Rockford friends dwelt most had happened only a few days before. Mr. Osburn himself had come upon Easton on the road near Rockford, mercilessly beating a high-spirited horse.

"I would not have known him for the same man whom I had been used to seeing," was Mr. Osburn's comment. "The man has a cruel heart. He has played a part with the Sylvestres, but sooner or later the evil in him will come to light."

"Poor Martha!" And Stephen groaned aloud. "Coarseness, cruelty and dishonesty joined to purity and sweetness such as hers!"

"Rachel will never let him ill-treat Martha," I said confidently.

“How do you know? There are a thousand cruelties which a husband can practice upon a sensitive woman, besides actual physical ill-treatment. And Martha would die rather than tell it of the man she has married.”

Two or three days later Rachel came by our place on Dolly and halted before the field where I was at work. I went at once to the road, and urged her to go into the house.

“No,” she said, “I must talk to you alone, and do it in such a way as not to attract attention. There is no one in the world whom I can talk to but you, and I come to you because of the conversation we had long ago, before—”

“Before Martha was married,” I said, boldly.

She nodded. “Joseph,” she said, “I would rather suffer torture than to tell you what I am going to. I despise myself for it, and yet there is no other way. It is a choice of evils. You are the soul of honor. I would trust you with anything, and trust you with Martha’s secret. She has married a man whom she fears and can not respect.”

She drew a long breath. “I shall not tell you what he is, or what she suffers. I dare not leave her for a day, for of me he seems to be afraid.” I did not wonder, for as she drew herself up, with dilating nostrils and flashing eyes, she looked like a creature who would inspire fear.

“I must not waste a moment’s time,” she went on; “I shall soon be missed, and called upon to give an account of myself. As you have seen, Mr. Easton has acquired a great influence over my father. He bends all his efforts in this direction, and carefully keeps back anything that father would oppose or disapprove. He knows very well that Martha would die rather than complain of

her husband. I sometimes go to my father, but he thinks I am prejudiced against Mr. Easton, because I was opposed to the marriage. But this is what I wished to speak to you about: Mr. Easton has persuaded father to divide his property, and give Martha her share immediately."

I saw the danger instantly. But what could be done? I was a man, but I knew no more of law at that time than my Queenie did. (I served several terms as justice of the peace, later on in life, but I never thought that my talents especially adorned the position.) It seemed to me that there ought to be some power to restrain the old Colonel from an act that could not but prove disastrous. But I knew of no help, and I had a strong feeling that none could be found.

"What put the plan into his mind?" I asked.

"Mr. Easton seems to have filled him with the idea that he could greatly increase the property, if he could have the handling of it now. Father talks constantly of what astonishing things 'my son-in-law' is sure to accomplish."

"Is he planning to divide the farm?"

"I hear only a little of the talk, but I judge that they are not quite agreed on this point. As nearly as I can tell, father's plan is to divide the farm into equal parts, and to use what ready money he has for another set of buildings. Mr. Easton seems to be weighing this, but in reality I think he is opposed to it. Perhaps it interferes with some plan of his own. At any rate, I notice that he never wants more money put into the property."

"For the best reason in the world, Rachel. He owes heavily, and your father has signed his notes. Ready money may be needed at any time."

Rachel looked puzzled. "Are you quite sure about this?" she asked.

"It came from Mr. Osburn," I said. I was as independent as ever, and did not care to have her know that Stephen had been concerning himself about her affairs. Somehow, I was always wishing to punish Rachel for the way she had treated Stephen. "Do you believe it possible," I ventured to add, "that your father really put his signature on those notes?"

"I dare say he did."

"I can't see why such a careful business man as your father could put such complete confidence in one who was almost a stranger to him."

"Neither can I, except as my observation is that every cautious man now and then does something venturesome. But father must be blind, to go on placing more and more power in his hands. Don't tell any one you have talked with me, Joseph. I am not in the habit of discussing family affairs."

I could bear witness that she was not. As she rode away I stamped to and fro in my impatience, longing to help my old playmates, and not knowing how I could be of the slightest use.

I learned afterward from Stephen that Rachel went to Rocksford and learned from Mr. Osburn all he knew concerning the notes. He really knew but little more than he had told Stephen, save the names of some of the men to whom Easton was indebted. No doubt Rachel thought this knowledge might be useful to her in an emergency, and so I believe it finally proved to be.

But her opposition did not prevent her father from deeding the north half of his farm to Martha, as Ross Turner, our village newspaper, duly reported that he had witnessed the deed, and intimated that he was "clear beat" to think Martha had come out ahead with her father, after all.

“I heard her say she didn’t want no land,” he condescended to inform us. “But the old man told her she was lucky to have a husband that knew business, and would take care of her property and make her a rich woman some day. He said he was going to manage Rachel’s half, and see which would come out first best. Then he and Easton passed a lot of fine talk back and forth, and each one let on that the other was the greatest man on earth. I guess them two swap considerable soft soap back’ards and for’ards.”

No doubt they did. Others might have but slender respect for Charles Easton, but his father-in-law’s confidence was certainly unshaken. A little after the transfer of the land, a carpenter from Rocksford came to confer with the Colonel concerning the buildings to be erected on Martha’s part of the farm. Charles Easton, it was said, was liberal with suggestions, and intimated that he desired his home to have many comforts which those of his neighbors did not possess. But he seemed willing to defer the work of building, and it was finally decided that he and Martha should remain in the Sylvestre home for one more year.

For the first time in several years, I worked for Colonel Sylvestre during harvest. Naturally, I observed the life of the household somewhat keenly. Rachel led in the management of the household, as she always had. Martha was devoted to the care of little Ray. When she played with her baby the sunny joyousness which was natural to her seemed to break over her face.

One scene which I witnessed then I shall certainly never be able to forget in this world. I wonder if I shall forget it in the next! I can feel the pain and the misery of my own helplessness all but as keenly now, in my tottering old age, as I felt it then.

Little Ray was at that interesting period of infancy when she was, as good aunts and grandmothers say, "beginning to take notice." Martha's innocent delight over her daughter's accomplishments was quite unbounded, and she was never so happy as when the baby "took notice" of things in general, and we older people took notice of the baby.

Perhaps it was because the rest of us were inclined to make much of the baby, that Easton began to pay some little attention to it. Up to this time, I had thought he showed small signs of affection for the little creature.

One day, when he spoke to the infant, Martha, who seemed greatly pleased, held Ray out to him. "See, Ray," she said, "that is Daddy! Go to Daddy, Baby!"

A shade of annoyance crept over Easton's face. "I must beg you, my love, never to use that word of *me*," he said. "Daddy is vulgar and disrespectful. *Never* teach the child to call me by that name."

Martha winced. "It isn't a very pretty word, I suppose," she agreed. "But I never thought of it, because Rachel and I used to call our father by that name. But I certainly will not teach it to Ray, if you do not like it."

It may be that he had thought he had shown unnecessary vexation, and wished to cause his wife to forget it. At any rate, he took Ray on his knee—a thing which I had never seen him do before. But the child was frightened, and began to cry.

"I had best take her," Martha said. "See, she wants to come to me. She is getting so timid!"

For answer, Easton tried to bend the rigid limbs of the baby. She only cried the harder. In a flash, the red blood flew over Easton's face, and then—O shameful sight, in the eyes of such a wife!—he struck the child a smart blow.

"I will manage this child as I please," he said, with an

oath. "If you want to make a fool of her, *I* will not. Here, take her!" and he threw the trembling, screaming child into Martha's arms.

The cry of horror which she had raised is still ringing in my ears. All had been done too quickly for me to make my escape, but I did so now, tingling with shame and dread. If Easton could fall into such a cruel rage with the presence of a neighbor to restrain him, what must he be when he and Martha were alone! And still her father trusted him!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YEARLY MEETING.

The great event of the season was to be the yearly meeting—the annual convocation of the disciples of the county, to be held this year in Blue Brook for the first time.

The spiritually well-fed believers of our day can not understand what these gatherings meant to the starved believers of that time, many of whom never heard a sermon except at their great annual feasts. In their separate communities, they met “on the first day of the week, to break bread.” Their sense of obligation in this was imperative. There might be excuse for neglect in other matters, but there could be none in this.

If there were in the congregation a man gifted in public speech, an address, more or less formal, preceded the Lord’s Supper. Otherwise, the elders “gave thanks,” and the eloquence was in the great fact commemorated, and not in the speech of men.

All the time, however, the longing to hear the good word grew within the hearts of the people. They came up to the yearly meeting careless of everything except their great opportunity. At other times these shrewd sons of shrewd Yankees were mindful of their stock and their crops. Now their minds were set upon hearing the great fundamentals of their faith again rehearsed.

The meeting this year was held in father’s woods. Stephen was at home, and we all worked together, hauling planks from the mill and making benches of them. We constructed a rude pulpit, too, and cleared out the lower spring, so as to make sure of plenty of good water.

My mother had her full share of the burden of preparation. She sewed sheets together, two and two, and bade us boys to be ready to fill them up at a moment's notice with the clean, sweet-smelling straw from the newly builded stack.

"Ten extra beds!" I said. "Where can you put so many?"

"Never you fear!" she told me, as she gave a loving pat to the last improvised mattress-cover. "There are the two rooms upstairs for the women, and the front room and the two bedrooms downstairs for the men. Fourteen beds—we can keep twenty-eight, but that isn't any more than our share."

"But there are four of us," I objected. But I could not upset her calculations as easily as this.

"There is the kitchen floor for me, and the new hay in the barn for you men folks," she said. "You didn't suppose you'd get a bed to sleep on, did you?"

Her preparations did not end here. A prime beef must be killed, and bread, cakes and pies baked. At first she kept account of the number of each class of articles provided, and repeated it to us joyously when we came in at mealtime. But as the frenzy took possession of her more and more completely, she simply baked and baked and baked, without any attempt at mathematical calculation. I wonder that the old brick oven did not burst with its sense of responsibility.

"Do get some one to help you," Stephen begged, one night when mother looked more weary than usual.

"I can't have any one around in the way when I'm in a hurry, and that's what 'help' amounts to. There's only one person that I'd give two pins to have around, and that's Rachel Sylvestre. And I dare say she'd rather burn her hands off than to cook for Campbellites."

And Stephen made no answer.

When our dear Maude Arrondale gives a dinner to six or eight, even with the co-operation of a *chef* and his aids, I am sure she takes it more seriously than my mother took her preparations to feed fifty persons for three or four days. And I am perfectly certain it is more serious business.

My part in the occasion was a humble one, but it kept me from enjoying the meetings to the full. I looked after the horses of the guests, who sometimes came from long distances, and were glad enough to turn the tired animals over to me for water and food.

It was not until Sunday morning that I was able to enter into the full enjoyment of the meeting. Such a meeting as it was! Such hungry, expectant faces as those of the worshipers, I can never hope to see again. The penalty of abundance is the sense of satiety.

The platform was filled with preachers, and I was conscious of a slight sense of importance in seeing Stephen among them, and in noting how his fellows seemed to respect and love him. Except on public occasions, I never thought of Stephen as a preacher.

My mother, who had been with father to the yearly meeting of the previous year, pointed out her favorite preachers to me.

“That plainly dressed man is John Henry. He is full of wit and eccentricity. Once a man told him he could not go to hear him preach, because he had no shoes. Bro. Henry sent him his own shoes, and went into the pulpit barefooted. That strong-faced man with the hymn-book is William Hayden. You will hear him sing—there is nothing like it. Ah, there comes Mr. Campbell!”

I bent forward, as did many another, to get a glimpse of the great leader to whom the religious world of his day

owed so much. Tall of figure and stately of bearing, with boldly cut features and keen eyes, he would have been a marked personage anywhere.

John Henry started the "Bondage Hymn," which I had often heard Stephen and Bro. Cady sing together:

"Our bondage here will end
By and by, by and by;
Our bondage here will end
By and by;
And our sorrows have an end
With our threescore years and ten,
And vast glory crown the day
By and by."

I do not remember anything more about the service until it came to the sermon. I wish I could set *that* down. But I fear I should make a sad failure of it, for nothing is more disappointing than an attempt to put down in black and white that which has profoundly moved one's inmost soul. I should like the Arrondale children of to-day to know what that sermon was like, but in order for them to know that it would be necessary for them to know the age in which it was preached, to know the crude religious teaching of the day to which its calm reasonableness was in such striking contrast, and to know the striking personality of the speaker. None of which can ever be. For in those days no one seemed to remember that history was being made, and much that we should count precious now has passed from memory forever.

Never, before or since, have I seen a man with so much real dignity and so little affectation of it. He impressed me as a man who was naturally very great, and who had been so fortunate as to have found a mission large enough to express all that was in him. He was quite without tricks of oratory. He made no gestures, he never declaimed or

gave expression to personal emotion. The truth!—this was his passion. Calm in manner, majestic in thought, he looked as a younger Moses might have looked, coming straight from the Mount of Divine Communication.

His text I remember. It was, “God said, Let there be light; and there was light;” and when he had read it he added these words: “This was the first speech ever made within our universe. It is indeed the most sublime and potent speech ever made.”

Then, with the quiet confidence of one who knows, he preached his sermon. He did not hasten, he brought forward truths apparently unrelated, and stated them clearly, yet in stately terms. By degrees, these truths began to assume relationships. We began to see a central meaning in them all. The work of creation, of providence and of redemption became alike the expressions of divine and gracious Fatherhood. We saw the light of the stars pale in the light of the moon, the light of the moon herself fail at the rising of the glorious Sun of righteousness. No longer was our world one of mischance and confusion, for in it we were allowed to see the benignant workings of that love which at all times does its best for man—that love which creates and sustains, and will eventually glorify us all.

A sermon two hours in length, and nobody weary! The speaker closed, but the first notes of the invitation hymn had not yet arisen, when a woman, tall and slender, walked with firm step down the middle aisle. My mother gave a little choking cry, and put her hand on my arm. It was Rachel.

I remember the first thought that came to me was that all the world had been converted now; that the work of the church on earth was done. Rachel! Why, that meant all that counted, in the way of opposition and difficulty, sud-

denly removed. It meant all alien powers turned suddenly into allies.

The preachers came down from the pulpit, and gave Rachel the welcoming hand. Stephen had been stricken with sudden pallor, and his face was that of one who hears news too good to be trusted as true.

Perhaps it was because the surprise had such full possession of the people's minds that there were no other converts. The hymn was sung through, but Rachel remained alone, standing in perfect quiet, with her hands clasped and her head bowed.

It fell to Stephen's lot to take her confession. When he asked for it, she remained silent for just a moment with her head still bowed. Then she raised her eyes, and repeated the words solemnly, in a clear, emphatic tone:

"I do believe—with all my heart—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

Then she spoke in a low voice to Stephen. He seemed to assent, and then said to the audience:

"Our sister requests that she may be baptized without a moment's unnecessary delay. Those who came to Christ in the olden time had the joy of obeying him in the same hour. We will go at once to the place of baptism, praying in our hearts that God may attend this act of obedience with his Spirit."

Some of the people brought out their horses and carriages, but most of us went on foot. My father and mother borrowed one of the neighbors' buggies, and took Rachel with them.

As the procession wound slowly through the woods, we sang again the old, old song:

"How happy are they who their Saviour obey."

To think that we were singing it for Rachel!

We had but just reached the road when we were overtaken and passed by a carriage containing two figures. One was Colonel Sylvestre. He was leaning forward in the seat, his hands resting upon a cane, his long hair blown about by the wind. The other occupant of the carriage was Charles Easton; and his driving must have been like unto the driving of Jehu, for he was driving furiously.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRICE OF DISCIPLESHIP.

Traveling on foot, I was slower than some of the rest in reaching the place of baptism. But my mother and Stephen gave me a full account of what transpired, so I tell it as it was:

When Rachel got out of the carriage, Martha slipped up and put her arm about her.

"Why did you come, dear?" Rachel whispered, kissing her tenderly. "It would have been better for you if you had not."

"I couldn't stay away, Rachel. Last night, after you told me, I couldn't sleep at all, for gladness. This morning I didn't have a moment to speak to you. I couldn't go to the meeting, so I came here, and waited for you. I wanted to tell you that Mr. Easton was at the meeting. He will hurry home and tell father."

"It need be no surprise to father. I told him that, if the way should be made clear to me at any time, I would walk in it without a moment's delay."

"He did not believe you would ever do it, though—he had such faith in his own teaching. I'm afraid he will be very angry."

"I never expected anything else, Martha. You were not afraid. Why should I be?"

At this moment, Charles Easton came up, with Colonel Sylvestre puffing after him. At the sight of his wife, an angry glitter came into Easton's eyes.

"Go immediately and get into the carriage," he said. And she obeyed him—this gentle Martha, upon whose sensitive ears no harsh word ought ever to have fallen.

The Colonel came up, and faced Rachel with lowering brow and flushed cheeks.

"You may get into that carriage and go home this minute," he said, "or you may stay away forever."

"I will stay away forever, then."

"Ah! you may think I will take you back, because I took your sister back. But I will not—I swear I will not! Martha was a child, and an easy prey for fanatical fools. They persuaded her, and frightened her with the idea that she would burn everlastingly if she didn't join them. But you—you"—his anger almost choked him—"you knew better. You disobeyed me deliberately. You have made your bed—you may die on it. I will never forgive you—I swear I will not."

"Good-by, father," said Rachel, very quietly.

Evidently he had expected her to argue the case, but she did not. She stood very still, her lips white, her hands trembling just a little.

He turned and strode away. As he did so, he encountered Stephen.

"Put her under ten fathoms of water if you want to," the old man said. "You will never wash the willfulness and ingratitude out of her."

He clambered into the carriage, and sat down beside Martha. Charles Easton sprang in after them and drove them quickly away.

The morning had been cloudy, but as Stephen and Rachel walked down into the water the midday sun broke forth, and its light seemed to envelop them. I am sure that no one who looked upon that scene ever forgot it.

Rachel sat between my mother and me at the solemn communion service that afternoon. She had begun to know an actual fellowship with Christ in his sacrifice, yet I am sure that this fact brought no diminution of her joy.

After the service, she asked if I would bring Dolly to her. "I rode her over this morning," she explained.

"Rachel!" said my mother, reprovingly, "you will not go away from us—now?"

"I shall find a place." I had never before understood what a troublesome thing such pride as hers can be. To all of us it seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should stay at our house until she could decide upon some plans for the future. But I could see that she was keenly sensible of having a favor offered to her, and that the sensation was by no means agreeable. She was a new Rachel, no doubt, but the new Rachel was made out of the old materials.

However, mother kept her for the time, and Rachel made herself useful about the house while our company remained. I well remember how astonished the preachers who were of the number seemed, at the quality of her conversation, and especially at her knowledge of the Bible. It surprised me, even, to find that she had been studying the Book for many months, never expecting, indeed, that she could accept its teachings, but feeling that simple justice demanded this of her. She felt that she had not dealt fairly with others, especially with Martha, and that she ought to base her objections to Christianity upon nothing less fundamental than a knowledge of the Bible itself. She could not herself tell when she first felt the longing to find the gospel of Jesus true. She had told this longing to no one, until the day before her baptism. Then she had told both her father and Martha of her intention to hear Alexander Campbell preach.

"And," she had added, "if he, or any one else, can answer for me the questions that are in my heart, I will instantly follow my faith."

Her father had stormed, then had mastered himself and tried to call up the arguments which had been effective with her in the past. She was surprised at their weakness, surprised that the faith that she had felt to be so imperfect was proof against them. In her surprise and thankfulness she was silent, and perhaps her father believed that he had triumphed.

The meeting on Monday morning was a wonderful occasion. It was a time of that precious exercise known in those days as "exhortation." I think the preachers of that day did better preaching than those of to-day can do, but in this noble art of exhortation I know they were a long way in advance. I sometimes hear it asserted that the teaching of the pioneers was coldly logical and intellectual. Ah! but those who so assert have forgotten about the exhortation! True, the logical gift and the gift of persuasion did not always dwell in the same man, but there is no need that they should. The Pauls companied with the Barnabases, and God was glorified through all.

These men who were born sons of exhortation did not scorn the ministry of tears. They themselves wept, oft-times, as they described the glories of the new Jerusalem, or the joy of reunited households. Their rhetoric was largely Scriptural. Death was "the Jordan;" heaven was "Canaan;" sorrow was "Marah's bitter stream;" joy was "Pisgah's shining mount." They differed one from another, as strong men differ; but they held together the vital, elemental truths of Christianity, and united in pressing them upon a needy world.

There was a great stirring among the people, that Monday morning, as these men pleaded. Again and again the hymn of invitation broke forth. Again and again earnest men and women crowded forward to declare their faith. Now and then a Christian wife led her husband to the

place of confession, or a Christian parent whispered an appeal to a wayward child.

To a mere observer it might have seemed that the audience was under an unnatural excitement. Yet nothing could possibly have been more natural or more reasonable. The preaching of the past few days had convinced the people; the time had come for them to act upon their conviction.

At last the closing moments came. There was a hymn of farewell, and the preachers went up and down through the audience shaking hands with the brethren and sisters and bidding them Godspeed. There were many tears, though they were no doubt expressions of joy rather than of sorrow.

That afternoon, after the last of the visitors were gone, Rachel wandered down to the beautiful grove where the meetings had been held. No doubt she felt that there, better than elsewhere, she could call up the resolution necessary to face the future.

I was not surprised to see Stephen follow her. There was plenty of work to be done, but I could fix my mind upon nothing. So I strolled up to the house, and helped mother to put things in order there.

I fancy she was as nervous as I. She kept watching the old clock, as she briskly folded away quilts and emptied straw pillows; and at length she asked:

“Are Stephen and Rachel together?”

“I think so.”

“I wonder if anything will come of it?”

“What should come of it?”

“You know what I mean. I love Rachel as if she were my own daughter, and yet I often wonder if it is in her to make Stephen happy. Perhaps he has never cared for her as much as I think, but certainly he seems to care

for no one else. As long as she held on to her skeptical notions, I was very anxious. It would have ruined Stephen's life. But now, I don't know! I don't know!"

Neither did I. I merely waited, and watched the clock, as mother did.

Stephen came in first—a good sign or a bad one, as one might choose to call it. He spoke kindly to mother, telling her not to be disappointed that he must hurry away this time. He had an appointment, and would leave early in the morning. Then he went out to the orchard, and flung himself down under a tree.

I went out and sat down beside him. As you have no doubt noticed in the course of my story, I was of a curious nature, and always interested in the affairs of others.

"Well?" I said.

"I have blundered sadly; I couldn't help it, Joe—I was so sorry for her. I couldn't let her go out and fight her way in the world alone, without even stretching out a hand. She is brave and strong, but what woman is brave enough for such a battle? She will make her way, but her heart will cry out for love and home."

"She hasn't as much heart as other women," I said, all my bitter feeling toward Rachel returning at the thought that she had scorned Stephen once more.

"Hush, Joe! She has more heart than any woman I ever saw, but I can't touch it. Heart! the ordinary little butterfly woman doesn't know the meaning of the word, as it applies to Rachel. Listen to me, Joe: she has not one word of fear for herself, of complaint at her lot. Her only regret—the one she can not shake off for a moment—is that she can not watch over and protect Martha and her baby. She seems to fear that they will come to actual physical harm."

"No wonder," I interrupted. And then I told him how I had seen Easton strike the baby.

"Horrible!" was Stephen's comment. "Think what those two women have suffered from those two men who should have lived to make them happy!"

My heart began to soften toward Rachel, as it usually did when I remembered her devotion to Martha.

"Did Rachel absolutely refuse to marry you?" I asked.

"Absolutely. She said, 'Do you think I could accept marriage as a refuge? That would be impossible.'"

"Perhaps it would, to a woman like Rachel. I don't like her pride, but it's a part of her, and one can't reckon on her and leave it out. Perhaps she couldn't bend it enough to accept marriage now, especially from you. It might even cheapen her own sacrifice in her eyes."

"Nonsense, Joe; if she loved me"—he spoke these words reverently, as if it were a kind of profanation to use them—"if she loved me, she would not hesitate. She knows I have always loved her; that I can never love any one else. Why should she care what any one might think? She is too brave for that."

"She may fear herself, though, especially if she really does love you. She is quite capable of questioning her own motives, and asking herself if her love for you had not influenced her course in becoming a Christian."

"No, she does not care for me. Sometimes I think she must care for some one else, but I do not know. At any rate, it makes no difference. I was a stupid blunderer to trouble her now, and I shall never speak to her of the matter again."

CHAPTER XXV.

STRANGE GUESTS.

Almost immediately after the close of the yearly meeting, Rachel went to Rocksford. She wished to teach school there during the coming winter, and in the meantime a warm welcome awaited her with the Osburns.

Before she went away she exacted from my mother that she would keep her informed concerning Martha's welfare.

"I have not forgotten that you took her in, too, when her own home was closed against her," she said. "I was grateful then, though I was too proud to say so; and I know better how to be grateful now. Let me have this one more thing to thank you for. Try to be a mother to my sister, as far as you can be. She is very young to be left alone."

"Alone" was a strange word to use, of one who was to be left with her husband and her father, but my mother understood, and promised.

Just as Rachel was about to enter Mr. Osburn's carriage, we saw Martha hurrying down the road, with her baby in her arms. I went to meet her, and took little Rachel from her.

"How nicely you carry her!" she said, with something of the artless gaiety of her childhood. "Mr. Easton never knows which end to pick her up by. Oh, I am so glad I shall be in time to see Rachel!"

Her hurried manner, and the fact that she was walking instead of riding, told me that she had watched her chance to slip away for a good-by. She threw herself into Rachel's

arms in a perfect tranport of affection, saying over and over: "I am so happy, sister—so happy!"

"Happy to have me go away?" asked Rachel, patting Martha's cheek lovingly.

"Happy that you have found the right way. That means happiness for both of us. Being apart in body need not matter so much, when our souls are so close together. See, Rachel, I have brought little Ray, for you to tell her good-by. Give her to my sister, Joseph."

Rachel took the baby, and laid its soft, dimpled face against her own. "I shall miss you, little one," she said. The mouth whose proud curve I had once disliked softened and trembled. Rachel *was* a woman, after all.

Martha would not let me drive her home, but said a brave good-by and hurried off before the carriage started. Rachel turned to me and held out her hand.

"You have been a good friend to me, Joseph," she said. "You have been a good friend to Martha. I have only one thing in the world, and that one I am going to give to you, begging you to believe that to take the gift will be to do me a favor. I can not take Dolly with me, and I will not sell her. She has been mine since she was a colt, and she seems to me almost like a human creature. You saved her from the fire for me, and now she is yours. Only, I want you to keep her as long as she lives."

"I will do nothing of the kind," I said. "I'll take Dolly, and take care of her as well as I know how, and keep her sleek and handsome until you can use her. But as for owning her—you know very well that I'll do nothing of the kind."

She saw that I was in earnest, and did not urge the matter. But you may be sure that I took good care of Dolly, and petted her so much that Queenie became a trifle jealous.

Strangely enough, the only member of the Sylvestre household whom I continued to see, after Rachel's departure, was Charles Easton. I fancy that he found life in our quiet neighborhood decidedly monotonous, and feared to seek his old haunts in Rocksford, lest he should encounter Rachel by the way. So he used to drop in on us now and then, and to treat us with something like cordiality.

The Colonel did not go out, and we heard from several sources that his health was wrecked. It seemed more than likely that his violent outburst of passion had shortened his life. The very day after Rachel's departure he made his will, taking care to read it to his witnesses, that they might publish its contents. (There were no newspapers.) By this will, all of the Colonel's property went to Martha for her lifetime, and to her child or children at her death. Rachel was not even mentioned.

It was in the early afternoon, not more than a month later, that we were surprised to see a woman riding up to our door, with a little boy mounted behind her. Strangers were seldom seen among us, and my mother was at once in a flutter of curiosity.

"Do go out and take her horse," she said. "Poor lady! how pale and ill she looks!"

I went to the turn of the lane, and found that our strange guest had halted there. She was a worn-looking woman, of about thirty-five, well dressed, and with the air of good breeding.

"Will you kindly tell me if Mr. Charles Easton lives here?"

"No, madam," I said. "He lives with his father-in-law, Colonel Sylvestre, on the next place."

"Thank you," she said, and was about to turn and ride out. But I saw that my mother was right, and that

she was very ill or very weary. So I begged that, unless her business was pressing, she would dismount and take rest and food. She accepted my invitation almost eagerly, and I did not wonder, when I lifted her from her horse and found how near she was to complete exhaustion.

The boy raced into the house merrily, delighted with the prospect of supper. His mother started to follow him, but tottered so that I hastened to support her. More and more heavily she leaned upon my arm, and when we were just across the threshold she sank upon the floor.

She had not fainted, though she was quite beyond speech or effort of any kind. My mother threw a blanket over the long settee by the stove, and between us we managed to lay our guest there. Presently she rallied sufficiently to take the hot milk which my mother brought for her. She even smiled a little to see the eagerness with which her little boy devoured his supper. But she was too weak for more than this, and presently she fell into a heavy sleep.

Little Mark—he had told us his name after much coaxing—seemed entirely happy in his new surroundings, but for a lively child he was very uncommunicative. I have ever had rather more than my natural share of curiosity, and you can imagine that I wished to know more of this strange pair who had landed at our door so unexpectedly. We had none of the newspaper sensations which feed curiosity in our time, and you may believe that the sight of a sick woman and a six-year-old boy, riding through the woods together, was enough to set all my inventive faculties in motion. So I questioned the little boy with the persistence of a detective. Don't call me ill-bred, young people. *You* have the daily papers.

“Did you ever ride on horseback before?” I asked of Master Mark.

"Yesterday I did, and the yesterday before that. I like it when the horse goes fast, but now the horse is tired, and mother is tired, and we can't go fast any more. I'd rather sleep here to-night, only I s'pose there wouldn't be any room. Say, was that last apple you gave me all the apples you've got?"

I was obliged to make a pilgrimage to the cellar for more apples, and when Mark's appetite was partially appeased I began again:

"Do you have apple-trees where you live?" I asked him.

"We don't live anywhere. We just stay 'round. Sometimes I stay at my Uncle Ephraim's, but *he* hasn't any apples on trees. He's got 'em in barrels, but he'll box your ears if you touch 'em, 'cause they b'long to the store. You can't eat what b'longs to the store, 'cause my Uncle Ephraim wants to sell it. You're nicer than my Uncle Ephraim. *You* don't want to sell your apples, do you?"

"No, indeed," I hastened to assure him. "I want you to eat them—as many as you can, at least, without getting sick. Where does your Uncle Ephraim live?"

"In—" He stopped short. "I guess my mother wouldn't like to have me tell you. She says it's bad of me to tell things, and I don't like to be bad, for fear I shall make her cry more. Does *your* mother cry a great deal?" And Mark cast an admiring glance at my mother's sunny face.

"I don't believe she does."

"My mother cries all day, sometimes. I wish she wouldn't, 'cause I have such a funny lump came up in my throat. But mother says *I* mustn't cry, 'cause I'm a boy, and boys must be brave, and take care of their mothers.

She says I'll soon be a man, and then I can take care of her for sure."

"Why doesn't your father take care of her?" I asked boldly. (I have no excuse to make for myself, except that the temptation was great.)

"'Cause he's bad!" broke out the boy, with sudden vehemence. "It's about him that my mother cries so much. If I was a big man, I wouldn't make my mother cry—would you? My daddy used to be good to me sometimes, and bring me sugar-plums. But sometimes he was awful bad, and my mother would cry to him to stop, and he just wouldn't. And one time he whipped me with a big whip out of the buggy, and I screamed, and he whipped me some more, and mother cried, 'Oh, he is killed!' and then my Uncle Ephraim came, and made daddy stop. And mother put me in bed, and I cried some more, and said I'd kill my father when I got old enough. I will, too," added Master Mark, confidentially.

I glanced at the sleeper by the fire. She was in the heavy stupor of exhaustion, and there was no possibility that the child's chatter would awaken her. With the shortness of memory characteristic of childhood, Mark, having once begun to talk, forgot all injunctions and restrictions.

"Once he whipped my mother," he resumed, the horror of the recollection in his tone. "My Uncle Ephraim says nobody but a brute whips a woman. She can't whip you, you see, and it's no fair. He cut a big hole in her cheek, and it nose-bleeded all over her dress. And then my Uncle Ephraim came in, and took him by the collar, and said a lot of awful swear-words. And that night my daddy went away—but"—with a sudden return to himself—"mother doesn't ever let me say anything about *that*."

By and by, when my little man had eaten all the apples he could manage, he grew drowsy, and dropped his head over on my shoulder. My mother came, and asked me what could be done for the comfort of our guest. It was a pity to shorten the sleep so sorely needed, but the settee was hard, and it would never do to leave her there for the night.

"Let her sleep a little longer," I advised, looking at the pale, drawn face, and noting for the first time a scar on the left cheek. "It will be easier to rouse her, after the first heaviness is past."

"I will make my bed ready for her in the meantime," said mother, with that delight in an emergency which is instinctive with women of her type. "Slip off the little fellow's shoes, and presently I will come and put him into your trundle-bed."

I did as I was bidden, and managed to remove the shoes so carefully that little Mark did not waken. It all came back to me an hour ago, when little Sylvestre Arrondale, who had been spending his after-supper hour in my den, begged me to take off his shoes and carry him up to bed.

There was a knock at the door. I could not but say "Come!" and Charles Easton entered.

"Good evening!" he said, with that slight condescension which I fancied I could always detect in his tone. "Ah! what little fellow have we here?"

He came forward into the light, and, as he saw little Mark's face, he frowned as if he were mystified. Then he turned, and caught a glimpse of the drawn, scarred face on the settee. In an instant he was as pale as death.

"Excuse me!" he muttered. "I didn't know you had company," and he strode out of the room.

I felt a stir in my arms, and, looking down, I found Mark sitting bolt upright, his eyes wide open and full of dangerous fire.

“That was my daddy!” he said; and the hatred in the child’s tone was something terrible to hear.

It seemed to me I had known it all along. That was why I had dared to ask the child such intrusive questions. Yes, I had known ever since she came that this woman was the wife of the man whom Martha called her husband.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

How to save Martha—this was the one thought in my mind. To hide the woman, to threaten the man—to do anything that would break the blow for this gentle girl, seemed at first the thing most desirable. How could she, who had sacrificed so much to wifehood, bear to be told that she was no wife?

Yet presently I knew that she must know. This poor, wronged woman had rights, and would maintain them. The truth must be told, and Martha must suffer. The left hand of the sleeping woman had slipped from under the cover, and on the third finger I saw a plain gold ring. Martha, too, wore one. What blasphemy were the words with which it had been placed upon her hand!

I longed with an unspeakable longing for Rachel. She could be told. She would know how to help.

But Rachel was not here. I must think what to do if, indeed, there was aught to be done.

Mark soon fell asleep again. I laid him in the little trundle-bed which had been Stephen's and mine long ago, and which mother had hastened to drag from its place of hiding. Then I went to my room, and paced up and down until morning.

Before daybreak my mother was stirring in the room below, preparing our early breakfast; but I did not go down at once. I dreaded to see her and to listen to her innocent guesses about our visitor. I would speak first to my father. His shrewd sense might help me. I slipped

down the stairs, and joined him as he went to his early tasks.

But he was as completely nonplused as I. Of one thing he was very sure—that Martha must know all very soon, and that she must bear her trouble as best she might.

“You think only of Martha’s side,” he reminded me. “But you must remember that this other poor soul has been shamefully treated, too, and that she has a child to think of, the same that Martha has. Poor little Martha!”

I saw his heart was as tender as mine toward Martha, though perhaps he saw the other side of the case more plainly. But he could suggest nothing, except that we keep our visitor with us for a few days, and examine closely into the proofs of her claim.

“Then do you bring her and Easton together and let them have it out,” was my father’s advice. “The tongue of woman is the only weapon that will ever punish that scoundrel as he deserves. Let ’em have it out, I say!”

I went into the house, little comforted, and still afraid to face my mother. To my great confusion, the first person I encountered, on entering the kitchen, was Martha Easton.

The first glance told me that she was in great distress. Her hair had been so carelessly coiled that already it was beginning to fall about her shoulders. Her eyelids were reddened, either from tears or watching. She was standing before the fire, drawing a shawl tightly about her shoulders.

“Good morning, Martha,” I said. “Why, how cold your hand is! I am afraid you are not well.”

“I am frightened about—about Mr. Easton. He went out last night, saying that he was coming here, and he has not come back. Your mother says he did not come here at all. I am afraid something has happened to him.”

"Oh, don't think that," I said, foolishly, trying to think whether I should tell her of Easton's hasty visit. "I—well—he *was* in here for minute, last night."

"He was here? For how long?"

"For only a minute. He saw we had other company, and went away at once."

She looked into my face with eyes that pierced my soul. I knew that I had blundered. "Your mother has told me about the woman and her little boy," she said. "It is very strange. Are you sure they were never in these parts before?"

"I am sure I never saw them before. But you must not be alarmed about your husband, Martha. He probably went further on to spend the evening, and was induced to stay all night."

"That is not likely. He would not have gone so far that he could not get home. I—I am afraid."

While I wondered what to say, the door opened, and Mark's mother walked into the room. A night's sleep had evidently brought refreshing, and her step was far steadier than it had been on the preceding night.

Before I could speak, my mother had bustled forward, with good-natured hospitality.

"I'm glad enough to see you up," she said. "I was calculating on giving you your breakfast in bed. This is my son Joseph—you met him last night, you know. And let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Easton—Mrs. Charles Easton. Mrs.—I don't believe I got your name."

"I am Mrs. Redding," the stranger said, looking at Martha and no one else, and, perhaps, maddened into cruelty by the girl's beauty. "And if you are known as Mrs. Charles Easton, ma'am, I've come to tell you that I am the lawful wife of the man that you call your husband."

Martha staggered and cried out, but my mother gathered her tenderly into her arms.

"His name is not Easton," the woman went on. "His name is Benjamin Redding. We were married in Albany nine years ago, and I have all the papers with me to prove it. He was poor, and my folks were well-to-do, and they were against the marriage. But he was good-looking, and had a way about him, and I was bewitched; so at last they gave in. Before we had been married very long I found that he was a very demon of cruelty. I have seen him wring the neck of an animal, for pure pleasure. He would have hurt me if he could, but he was afraid of my family, especially of my brother, who had always read him like a book. If I had known him as well from the beginning, myself, I believe I could have cowed him. After our boy came, things went better for a little while, and then a great deal worse. When he tried to torment Mark, it turned me into a fury. My husband began to get tired of my tempers, and I soon saw that he was ceasing to care anything for me. I found out other things about him, too. He had times of drinking heavily, and he made debts everywhere. At last there was a scene a little worse than the rest between us, and he went away. After he was gone, it was found that several honest men had undersigned him, and were ruined. I did what little I could do; I resigned my claim to my father's estate; and my share went in to help clear up my husband's debts. It did not go far, but it was all I could do."

She paused, as if waiting for one of us to speak, but we were silent. In spite of my prejudice, I could not help but see that there were many elements of strength and nobleness in this injured creature. In happier surroundings, she might have made a happy and useful woman.

“At first,” she went on, “I did not care what became of him. I did not want to know. It was a relief to be free, and I did not think beyond the day. After awhile, though, I began to wish I knew something about him. I was afraid he would come back, and try to take Mark away from me. He did not love the child, but he loved to be cruel, and he knew I could be hurt through the child. Strange as it may seem, I never once thought that he might try to marry again.

“My brother and sisters have taken care of Mark and me, and I have worked in their homes as much as I was able. There was no way by which I could earn a living for both of us, but I helped what I could.

“Last year a man who had always lived near my brother moved to this part of the country, and settled a little way beyond Rocksford. Three months ago he wrote to Ephraim that he had seen Benjamin Redding on the Rocksford road; that he had inquired about him, and learned that he was married and living with his father-in-law near Blue Brook.

“When I heard this, I vowed that I would come here and face him. My brother opposed it. He said I was rid of bad rubbish, and ought to let well enough alone. But I could not rest. I suppose I had some idea of making him suffer for his sin, but I had another idea with it—I wanted to keep him from more mischief than he had already done.

“So I came. The journey wore me out, and these people had to take me in and care for me. Perhaps it was because I am weak and ill that I could not bear to see you, ma’am, so young and beautiful. But you will suffer all the more, for the time to live will be longer. And now, ma’am, I am very sorry for you.”

Martha did not accept Mrs. Redding’s sympathy. She

lay quite still for some time in my mother's arms. Then she suddenly aroused herself, and sat bolt upright.

"He saw her last night, didn't he?" she asked, with terror in her eyes. "Didn't you say, Joseph, that he came in and found her here? He may—oh, Joseph, don't you see that he may have done some dreadful thing?"

Her meaning flashed over me. I started to reassure her, then stopped short. Perhaps two horrors were easier for her to bear than one.

"We will have search made," I said. "We shall soon be able to find out all about it, I am sure."

"I must go home now," she said. "I have left father and Ray. I can not stay here any longer. I *must* go." She spoke almost petulantly, as if some one had opposed her wish.

Mother brought some breakfast to her, but she would not taste it.

I put Rachel's saddle on Dolly, and led her up to the door. "Shall I go with you?" I asked.

She nodded. I flung myself upon Queenie and rode after Martha, wondering what would happen when the Colonel heard the news.

Martha did not wait for me, but slipped from the saddle and hurried at once into the house. On the threshold she paused, and mechanically shook hands with Ross Turner, who was just leaving the house.

"He is not there, father," Martha called, the dread aroused by the man's disappearance still uppermost in her mind. "Joseph says he was there for just a little while last night and went away—"

"I have later news," the Colonel said. (Either he did not see me, or he did not consider my presence worth noticing—probably the latter.) Ross Turner called to impart some very singular facts. He says that he started

out hunting very early this morning, and met Mr. Easton, who was on horseback. Ross expressed surprise at seeing him abroad at such a time, and Mr. Easton explained that he had been called away on important business, and might not return for several weeks. Mr. Turner being, as—ha!—you may recollect, of a somewhat curious disposition—called, ostensibly with relation to the sorrel colt, but in reality to learn the nature of your husband's business. It is quite unnecessary to say that I—ah!—did not enlighten him. But I must say that the whole affair is quite extraordinary—quite extraordinary!"

In spite of his elaborate English, I could clearly see that the Colonel was much excited. I remembered what I had heard of Easton's—or Redding's—debts in Rocksford, and what his wife had said of his dishonesty. It seemed more than likely that the Sylvestre fortune was involved in the action of this man.

But a fortune seemed like a poor thing just now. Would Martha tell her trouble to her father? To ask sympathy from such a man would seem like commanding water from the rock.

A bundle in the cradle stirred, and a child's cry roused Martha to the full meaning of her sorrow. With the groan which has sounded in my ears from that day to this, she flung herself across the cradle. "He will never come back!" she cried. "He had a wife before he ever saw me, and he will never come back!"

For the first time, the Colonel seemed to see me. He was trembling from head to foot, and a purplish flush seemed to overspread his face.

"Do you know what she means?" he asked me. Something in his appearance alarmed me, and I answered, guardedly:

“There may be some mistake, sir, but a woman has appeared who claims to be Mr. Easton’s wife.”

Martha gathered little Ray into her arms, and stood erect. The womanhood within her seemed to speak as it had never spoken before.

“There is no mistake,” she said. “There are many things beside her words that tell me so. The woman is his wife.”

Slowly the purple flush on the Colonel’s face deepened. An expression as of awful hate settled in his eyes. “Curse him!” he said. Then he fell forward heavily upon the floor.

Martha was kneeling at his side in a moment. I thought at first that he had fallen through sheer weakness, but soon his heavy breathing told me that the attack was serious, if not fatal. What could I do? It seemed heartless to leave Martha alone at such an hour, yet help must be had, and that as speedily as possible.

I started out, and met my mother in the lane. Dear mother! I might have known that she would not stay long away from Martha, in such a time of need.

“Does the Colonel know?” she asked me.

“He has known. I doubt if he will ever know anything again.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Colonel has had an attack of some kind, and is unconscious. Stay with Martha.”

I remember how Queenie neighed when I mounted her.

“Good speed, my girl,” I whispered. “You must do your best to-day.”

I went by the village store, and sent a messenger for the doctor. Then I rode like mad for Rachel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“AS THE TREE FALLS.”

Colonel Sylvestre never regained consciousness, although he was still living when Rachel reached him.

I do not know, at this day, how I managed to tell Rachel the horrible story of Martha's trouble. My memory of the earlier events of the day are as keen as if all had transpired but yesterday; but I suppose that in time one's power to feel and remember is exhausted; and I recall only Rachel's set white face, and her self-accusing cry, “And I left my darling to bear it alone.”

I fancy that Rachel's keenness of perception must have saved me from the necessity of going into details. She had always distrusted Easton, and now she saw clearly many things which she had only suspected before. I believe that she suffered for Martha almost as severely as Martha suffered for herself; for at this instance, she was able to take in more fully all that was involved for the future.

Of her father, I remember that Rachel spoke only once. Then she said, “I suppose he would not forgive me, even if he could.”

Whether or not he would have forgiven her if he could, we never knew, for the opportunity did not come. He died at midnight. Rachel, my father and I had been watching beside him. Martha was lying, very ill, in the adjoining room, and my mother was caring for her. The doctor had given her an opiate, which had not induced sleep, but had brought a semi-delirium which was perhaps better than consciousness.

There had been little change, from the first, in the Colonel's heavy breathing. The doctor had said that the end might come in a day or a week, but that there was no chance that he would rally. Yet, in spite of this, I think Rachel hoped for something—for a word or the pressure of her hand—to tell her that she was forgiven.

She was too just and reasonable to dream of tardy repentance. She knew that her father had willfully, all his life long, mocked at God and his offers of mercy, and that, even if his mind should come back to this world, he would die as he had lived. A passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes came into my mind. Perhaps it was in Rachel's also: "If the tree falls toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth there shall it lie."

At half-past seven, I thought I noticed a change in the breathing. The others did not see it, and I said nothing. Rachel sat as silent as stone. Father dozed lightly in his chair. In the next room, Martha muttered in her delirium. The strain was almost intolerable. I had not slept at all the night before, yet never had I felt more sleepless.

All the strange scenes of the past few hours moved again and again through my mind. Never before, in my simple life, had I realized what sorrows and sins there are in the world. Now, naturally enough, it may be, I was inclined to go to the other extreme, and believe that evil and heartache were everywhere. If not, why should Martha, innocent and gentle as she was, be obliged to suffer so?

Yet Martha had done one great wrong—the partiality of my heart could not blind me to that fact. She had sinned against her womanhood in marrying a man whom she did not love, and this is one of the sins for which the present world brings its punishment.

Some one was riding into the lane. I thought it must be the doctor. He had promised to come back before morning, if possible.

Rachel did not seem to have heard the sound. She was sitting, as she had been for an hour, with her head bent forward a little and her hand resting upon it. The door opened and Stephen walked quietly into the room.

I had grown so used to strange things that it did not then occur to me as anything out of the ordinary that he should be there. I knew only that I had unconsciously wished for him, and that he was here.

Afterward, when I thought to ask him about the matter, I found that he had arrived in Rocksford soon after I left, had heard of my hasty summons to Rachel, and had followed us to her home.

I suppose Rachel was no more surprised to see him there than I was. She gave him her hand, without rising, and motioned him to a seat beside her.

He looked quickly over the little group, then the incoherent murmurs from the next room reached him.

"Martha?" he whispered.

"She is ill—she is worn out—we have made her lie down," Rachel said. There was no time now for Martha's story.

The sick man gasped convulsively, and stopped breathing. Stephen leaned forward and felt for his heart. "It is the end," he said, solemnly.

Rachel did not sob or cry out. She stood erect, while Stephen closed her father's eyes, and smoothed the covers about him. Then she sank on her knees beside the bed, whether to grieve or to pray I could not tell.

Stephen knelt on the other side, with father and myself. I wish I could recollect the words of the prayer that Stephen poured out at that moment. I can bring back

only the opening sentence: "O God, our Refuge and our Strength, our very PRESENT Help in trouble!" With those words, I began to feel that God was there, in that house where hearts were breaking; and I felt that he would not allow his children to suffer uncomforted.

Rachel did not rise after the prayer, and we slipped softly from the room, leaving her alone with her dead.

Stephen and I threw ourselves down on blankets in the kitchen, but I knew that my brother would not sleep, and presently I crept close to him and told him all.

He sat upright, a kind of sick horror in his eyes. "Where is the man now?" he asked.

"I don't know. Making tracks, I suppose. There has been no time to think about *him*, and no one to say what should be done."

"Perhaps it is just as well. We can think more clearly in a day or two."

"Maybe it would be the easiest way, to let him get away altogether. Mrs. Redding might be induced to keep quiet, and no one else knows but us."

I saw from Stephen's face that he had thought of the same thing. It was a sore temptation to save Martha from one added humiliation. But he put it away quickly.

"It would not be right," he said. "It would not be Rachel's way, nor Martha's either, when she understands. If the legal wife had been more watchful, Martha would not have been so injured. Now it becomes the duty of them both to protect some other woman, whom he would injure if he could. But we will think and pray, and try to know what is best."

Perhaps after that we slept a little. The morning found Martha no better. The doctor was puzzled. We lived before the time of "nervous prostration," which is, I believe, the easy name given nowadays to a pressure of

work or joy or sorrow too great for the body to endure. So he shook her head, and bled her freely, and promised to come again the next day.

Rachel was with her sister all the morning; but toward noon she came out, with little Ray in her arms, and asked Stephen to make arrangements for the funeral.

"Please tell me just what you wish, Rachel," said Stephen, quietly, giving her a seat beside him. "You wish it to be here?"

"I wish it to be here, and as quiet as possible. Martha does not know, yet. The time may not come to tell her. There must be nothing that will disturb or alarm her. I think I can manage that."

"But there is something else. You wish to have a preacher?"

"I wish to have *you*, Stephen—just you. It is not for him, you understand. He would not have wanted a preacher, and there must be no make-believe. He did not believe, and you will not say that he did. But I think it is right that we should have you for our sakes—Martha's and mine."

"It is right," said Stephen. I could guess that the task which had come to him was one of the hardest he had ever attempted, but he could not let Rachel know that it was hard.

When I said this to him that night, he answered: "That is not all. It will be a hard thing to conduct Colonel Sylvestre's funeral, but think of letting some one else do it, and say what he might to wound those poor women!"

Ross Turner's version of Charles Easton's absence had gone abroad, and many of the neighbors expressed their regret that Colonel Sylvestre's son-in-law could not be present at the funeral.

"It's too bad," said one of them. "He and the Colonel were so took with each other, and the mourners is so few, anyway."

Unconsciously, the old man told the truth. The "mourners" were few. Colonel Sylvestre had exerted a masterful influence in our community for years, but he had never been loved. His neighbors had stood in awe of him, and had given him the semblance of respect; but they did not mourn for him now.

Martha was not present at the funeral service. She was conscious now, but very weak. It had fallen to Stephen's lot to break to her the news of her father's death, and she had received it with the pitiful apathy of one whose emotions have been drained dry.

So Rachel sat as sole mourner. The service was a brief and simple one. Stephen read the Scripture and offered prayer, and the neighbors looked their last upon the hard old face. It *was* hard, even in death, and if Rachel looked into it for the forgiving tenderness she had missed in life, she certainly never found it.

A tall monument towered above the mound where Mrs. Sylvestre slept, and in the open grave beside it we laid the body of her husband. It was only after we turned away that we remembered in what loneliness the two whom he had left behind must henceforth walk.

Mrs. Redding and little Mark remained at our house until after the funeral. At first, in my sympathy with Rachel and Martha, I rather resented the presence of this woman, who had brought them sorrow. But by degrees I became accustomed to her presence, and even learned to give a share of my sympathy to her. The moment's resentment which her first glimpse of Martha had brought, gave place to real pity, and now she was eager to do something for the woman who had suffered through her husband.

She even asked my mother if she might go and say this to Martha.

My mother shook her head. "Martha has lived—that is all," she said. "One thing more, and she may die. If the time for it ever comes, I will tell her how you feel toward her. That will be better than that you should try to see her now."

The one thing that seemed to rouse Martha from her apathy was the thought of little Ray. My mother told us that she always remembered the child's bedtime, when she seemed unconscious of everything else. Except for the little girl, she seemed to have no hold upon life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOG HUT BY THE ROAD.

It was impossible that such a curiosity-loving community as ours should wait always to know the cause of Charles Easton's sudden departure. While his easy habit of dispensing hospitality in Colonel Sylvestre's name had made him some friends among the rougher class, there had always been a few of the more sensible persons who looked upon him doubtfully, and wondered that Colonel Sylvestre should have accepted his claims so readily.

People were not in the habit, in those days, of starting upon journeys abruptly. Nowadays, a business man slips across the continent without bothering to kiss his wife good-by; but when travel was difficult and slow, no sane man wished to miss the importance which a leave-taking gave him. That a man should disappear before daybreak, without a word to his friends, was preposterous.

It began to be whispered about Rocksford that Charles Easton had left his home unceremoniously. There was immediate alarm. His creditors began to compare notes, and to see the seriousness of the situation. They asked each other openly—so I was told by Mr. Osburn, who kept us posted concerning Rocksford affairs—whether Easton was supposed to have quarreled with his father-in-law. At all events, they said, it was time that their claims against the Sylvestre estate were pushed.

Colonel Sylvestre's will, as I have said before, gave all of his property to his daughter Martha. What I had not known before was, that Charles Easton was made sole ex-

ecutor of the will. This fact made it the more necessary that the cause of his absence be known.

Nor was this all. We had tried to keep the presence of Mrs. Redding at our house a secret, but in the hurrying to and fro which followed Colonel Sylvestre's death she had been seen by several persons, who were but poorly satisfied with such embarrassed explanations as we could give them. We feared every day lest she should be connected in the minds of the people with Charles Easton's disappearance.

"It would be better to have it all over," Rachel said, in a tired voice, one day when I called to bring my mother home. "Hushing things up never brings any good. The only thing I fear is the shock for Martha. Her life hangs by a thread. Sometimes I think we can not save it, and save her reason too. For her sake we must be careful how we move."

I came home and told Stephen what she said. Next morning, when I came downstairs, his horse was saddled and at the door.

"I must go and hunt that man," he said. "I have thought it over, and it is the only way. If I need the authority of the law, I will get it; but the first thing is to find out where he is and what he is about. I can do this quietly, and as quickly as any one. Tell Rachel."

I told Rachel, and it seemed to me that the message should have evoked some expression of gratitude from her. But it did not. She merely walked to the window and looked out, as if she expected to see Stephen riding away to his hard task.

The days went by. I began my term of school in the new schoolhouse which had replaced the slab-floored structure of my childhood. Mrs. Redding and little Mark went back to their friends, the other side of Rocksford. Rachel

nursed Martha, cared for little Ray, and put off the men who came to her to discuss business matters. Thus we waited for Stephen.

One day, just as I was starting for my school, a rough-looking man rode up to the door and gave me a note. It ran about like this:

DEAR BROTHER:—Bring Mrs. Redding and the boy and follow this man. Put into the wagon some quilts, and such food as mother has ready. *Do not wait.* I have found Charles Easton in a sad condition. STEPHEN.

I wanted to go to Rachel, but the words “Do not wait” seemed to deter me. I hurriedly harnessed the horses, and bundled Mrs. Redding and Mark into the wagon.

The woman was sad and silent, and her mood affected the boy. So we had a quiet journey. Once Mark slipped his hand into mine and whispered, “Are we truly going to see daddy?”

“I think so.”

“You won’t let him hurt me, will you, Joseph?”

“No, indeed, Mark. He won’t want to hurt you, though.”

“Not the first thing, maybe. But he always gets tired of being good, in a little while. Mother would keep him from hurting me if she could, but she can’t—can you, mother?”

Mrs. Redding smiled sadly, but did not answer. I wonder if the ghost of her mad love for this man still walked in her heart. Did she dream of that long-past time when, in reckless defiance of the judgment of others, she had flung her life into his keeping? I could not guess.

The place to which our guide led us was almost new to me, although it was not more than a dozen miles from our home. The road for the last few miles was a lonely,

one, and, in bad weather, must have been impassable. Even now, our light wagon made slow progress.

We stopped before a little log hut at the side of the road. It looked uninhabited, but a thin line of smoke rising from the chimney told of the presence of human life within.

Our guide had dismounted, and disappeared within the cabin. Stephen appeared, and beckoned to me.

"He is still living," he said, "but very far gone. Did the man tell you how I found him?"

"I didn't ask him—didn't know whether it was safe to discuss matters with him."

"It is safe enough, I dare say, though I think he has little knowledge of the situation. When I left home, I had only one idea about Easton's whereabouts. I felt sure he would avoid Rocksford, for he is so well known there. So I started out in the opposite direction. I rode for days. I have friends in nearly every town, and I was able to make my search a thorough one without awakening suspicion. Nowhere did I get the slightest trace of him, or even a hint that I could imagine might point toward him. At last I got thoroughly discouraged, and started for home. I took this road because it was a strange one, but without any real thought of getting my clew here. As I passed this cabin, I saw Easton's horse tied to the fence. I should have known him anywhere. I came to the door, and heard a groan inside. I did not risk knocking, but walked straight in. Easton was lying on a miserable bed on the floor, in the most excruciating pain. I learned afterward that he had left the road on which Turner met him, and had kept in hiding until dark. Then he tried to cross by this road, but it was new to his horse. Somehow, the horse stumbled and threw him. He lay by the roadside until morning. Then he was found by the man

who brought you here. In spite of Easton's suffering, he refused to let the man Stoney go for a doctor. Stoney managed to drag him into the house and has taken care of him ever since. At last Stoney got so frightened that he went for a doctor without leave. I don't know what the doctor thought, but he kept his own counsel. He said that there was little to be done; that Easton's spine was injured, and though he might live for some time in helplessness, he would never recover. He left morphine, and told Stoney to get more if it was needed. Since then, Easton has been under the influence of opiates most of the time. He recognized me soon after I came, and I got the whole story from him. He has paid Stoney well to keep him here, and to hold his tongue."

"Does he know he is going to die?"

"I have told him so, but he will not believe it. His heart is hard toward every one, unless it is his little boy. When I told him that I had seen his wife and child, he asked quickly whether Mark was well, and added, 'Poor little chap! poor little chap!' He has never seemed to think once of poor Martha's child."

"Does he know that you expect his wife?"

"Yes. He did not know until half an hour ago. We must not delay, for I think he has not long to live. He is conscious now, but weak and irritable."

Stephen motioned to Mrs. Redding, and she and little Mark went in before us. The woman knelt beside the wretched bed, and drew over it carefully one of the warm quilts we had brought with us. Easton looked up, and cried out excitedly:

"Emily!" he said. "My God, it is Emily."

"Here is Mark, Benjamin."

"Mark? So it is, poor chap! Know your daddy, little man?"

"Yes, sir," said the child, in an agony of shyness.

"You've found me in a bad fix, Emily. I never meant to go back on you and the boy altogether. I got tired of your tears and complaints, but I wouldn't have gone back on you, if I hadn't got into such an infernal mess about money matters. I never meant to marry any one else, but I was in a tight place, and the girl *was* a beauty. Is it true that the old man is dead?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Martha will get it all. The other one is a Tartar—*she'll* get her deserts. But it'll do me no good, now you have found me out. The preacher says I'm going to die, but I don't believe it. If there is a God in heaven, he wouldn't be so cruel as to take me now."

"Cruel!" repeated little Mark, with sudden recollection. "That's the thing daddy was when he whipped me, isn't it?"

The sick man winced. "Send the youngster out, Emily. I'm too tired to talk any more. You've no idea what this cursed pain is like. It is ten thousand irons, burning me at once. Oh, a dog deserves better than this."

"A dog may, but you don't," were the words which came into my mind. Yet I could not but soften toward the man, as I saw how pitiable was his condition.

Stephen came close, and bent over the bed. "Benjamin Redding," he said—and I saw that the man shrank from the old name—"you have only a short time to live. If there is anything you can do before you die, to make restitution to those whom you have injured, I advise you to do it at once. Do not add to your sins by withholding now the little you can do to right these wrongs."

"I am *not* going to die," cried Easton, with awful vehemence. "Curse all your praying, sniveling crew—I'm not going to die."

"Hush, Benjamin," said Emily Redding, sternly. "You are going to die. You have been a bad man, and I—God forgive me!—have not been a very good woman. I have been passionate and headstrong, and often I have left God out of the account. But I want to do one good thing—I want to do one good thing—I want to forgive you before you die. Not many women have more to forgive than I have, it seems to me. But I can't forgive you unless you repent and want to be forgiven. You *must* repent."

"I won't. I'm not going to die. I'll get out of this, yet. Oh, the pain! Give me some morphine, quick!"

"Not yet," said Stephen. "You may never return to consciousness again. I can not let you leave this world until you have faced your past, and asked yourself whether there is any of its wrong-doing that you can make right."

"Curse you, I *must* have the morphine. I suppose it's about the old Colonel's money that you are making all this fuss. Here, then, Joseph Arrondale, you are an honest fellow, and no preacher. Unbuckle this belt, will you? No one has found it except the doctor, and I soon shut *his* mouth. What there is sewed in there belongs to Martha. It's all there is left, and you may take it back to her. The rest I spent, and this would soon be gone, so she might as well have it. Now get me the morphine—I won't stand this pain—I won't stand it!"

He began to curse and rave, and Stephen gave him the morphine. He closed his eyes, then opened them again, and sought his wife's face.

"Emily," he groaned, "don't tell the little chap how bad I was."

If there was in his heart any sorrow for his sin, these words were the only evidence he gave of it. That night he died, and his wife was denied the comfort of offering him forgiveness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET PAGE.

In a long lifetime of observation I have noticed that evil news always travels more rapidly than good. Stephen and I questioned much as to whether the whole story of Charles Easton's life and death need ever be told. There was no one to be injured by our silence. Mrs. Redding was now full of pity for Martha, and would gladly have saved her if she could. If Martha should rally, she would have enough to bear, without this last humiliation.

But we soon found that our silence would not avail. The story was abroad, as if the wind had carried it. We afterward learned that Ross Turner had been full of curiosity about Easton's whereabouts, and had not ceased to make inquiries concerning him. In Rocksford he heard the stories—now freely told for the first time—of Easton's debts and dishonesty. To Rocksford, ere long, was brought the account, through the relative with whom Mrs. Redding had stayed, of Easton's first marriage and his desertion of his wife. It did not take much effort to piece the different parts of the story together; and Ross was prompt to put his discovery into circulation.

Slowly, after long weakness and many relapses, Martha came back to life. The necessary facts concerning Easton's end were gently told to her by Stephen. She asked no questions, but listened with a pinched and piteous face. When he finished, she buried her face in her hands.

"My poor, poor baby," she murmured. "My poor little Ray!"

After that, it was a long time before she walked again. But by degrees she began to go about the house, and even to venture out a little. For a long time she shrank from meeting people, and I was much surprised one Sunday, in early summer, to see her sitting in the little church, beside Rachel, who held Ray on her lap.

After this, she was seldom absent from her place, on Sunday morning. We had preaching only now and then, but church-going in those days meant something besides attendance at a literary lecture or a sacred concert, and those who believed kept faithfully their tryst with the Lord, on the first day of every week.

We soon found that the financial affairs of the Sylvestres were in sorry shape. My father was appointed administrator of the Colonel's estate, which, according to the terms of the will, belonged to Martha. One-half of the farm was already hers, and, when she came to learn the conditions of the will, she refused to accept anything beyond this.

However, as Rachel well knew and as we all soon learned, it mattered little what the conditions of the will were, or what were the wishes of the two women with regard to the property. Easton had already squandered a large part of Colonel Sylvestre's ready money. Whether he had made a pretense of borrowing this, or whether he had helped himself to it, of course we never knew. Rachel told me that her father made a practice of keeping large sums about the house, and that she had often protested against this habit as involving the family in danger. The Colonel had been wont to laugh at her fears, and in his ridicule Easton had always joined. The probabilities are that, when he found flight necessary, he took whatever he found in the strong-box. If so, this was the money he gave me to return.

The notes which the Colonel had signed with Easton were paid as they were presented. That this might be done, all of the farm was sold except forty acres of the east part, which included all of the buildings. Rachel would have sold the whole and gone to seek a home for herself and her sister elsewhere. But against this, Martha, usually so acquiescent, protested.

"I could not bear to have strange eyes look at me," she said. "I could not *bear* it, Rachel."

So they stayed on in the old home. Rachel managed the little farm with wonderful skill, and saw that Martha lacked none of the comforts to which she had been accustomed.

A year passed quietly. It has ever seemed, in my life, that surprising events are closely crowded together, and succeeded by periods of calm, in which all days are much alike. I taught the district school in the winter, and helped my father in the summer. Stephen went on longer journeys than heretofore, for the circle of his influence was widening, and he was sent to preach in distant places. There was little to mark the year, except the growth of little Ray, who alone, of us all, the time seemed to change.

But other changes were before us. I come to write of them with a pen which often falters, for I feel that I have dipped it in my own heart's blood.

One sunny morning I called at the Sylvestre home, and found Martha looking brighter and stronger than she had looked since her sorrow. Ray was in her lap, cooing out the pretty baby talk which it puzzled every one but her mother to understand.

Martha greeted me kindly, as she always did. I took Ray from her, and the little one played with the buttons on my coat while I talked to her mother. Little children have ever been my friends, and I should lose much out of

the memories of my long life if I were to forfeit the happy hours I have spent among them.

I can recollect that June morning far better than I recollect the events of yesterday. I can see Martha's looks, as she sat there by the window, as plainly as I see the pretty Maude Arrondale who sits beside me as I write. She wore a dress of some soft, dark stuff—she was ever plain in her dress, as it becomes so beautiful a woman to be—and about her neck was a collar of some sort of fine needlework. Her soft, dark brown hair was parted, and allowed to fall in its own natural waves. The miniature of Martha Sylvestre, painted in her school days, does not do her justice: yet I heard the artist who painted Maude Arrondale's last portrait say of that quaint little old picture, "This is the American Madonna! I have searched for her all my life, and I have never found her until now!"

Little Sylvestre Arrondale has eyes like Martha's—like, save that his are the eyes of a handsome child, and hers were the eyes of a saint.

We talked of many things that morning. I had not meant, even when I began to fill these pages, to write down what we said. The story has been sacredly kept in my heart through all the years, and I meant that it should die with me. But as I have written on there has come to me a desire to have those of my name, who may read these pages, know the secret of my lonely life. As we grow old, the desire to be kindly remembered by the world we are leaving seems to grow upon us. I would have those who will sometimes think of me when I am gone think of me as neither a cynic nor an alien from life's common interests, but as one who had and kept a human heart. So I tell the story of that June morning, concerning which I had meant to be silent.

I told Martha how glad I was to see her stronger.

"I am stronger," she said. But her voice lacked the old ring, and she looked out across the hills, as if seeing there something that others did not see.

Then she turned quietly and looked at me. "I have changed a great deal since the days when we used to be together," she said. "I have lived, oh, so much, in such a little while. I do not blame any one except myself, but I hope that, when Ray is a woman, those who care for her will keep her from knowing the dark side of life while she is as young as I was. "

I remembered afterward how strangely she spoke of Ray's future, as if it were a thing in which she was to have no share. But at the moment my mind was full of the past, and I did not dwell upon the words.

"I wish I could have saved you from it all, Martha." I felt that my words were bungling enough, but they were from the heart. "I have always loved you, Martha—you must have known that. I was so unworthy that I dared not tell you. I was always hoping to grow more worthy. I felt sure you did not care for me except as a friend who had been your playfellow from childhood. I thought you cared for me even a little less than for Stephen. Was I not right, Martha?"

"Perhaps you were right," said Martha, with a little blush. "But why do you tell me all this now? It is all past—all past."

"No," I said; "it is not likely to be all past for me. I have few virtues, but constancy is one of the few. If such a thing be possible, you are dearer to me because of the past; dearer because of what you have suffered. I did not mean to startle you. I did not mean to tell you this to-day. But sooner or later I must have told you. I will not ask for an answer. Indeed, I do not want an

answer, for I know what, in your surprise, you would be sure to say. I have nothing to offer you. I am not good, and I shall never be great. But if you will let me try to serve and comfort you, and be a father to little Ray—oh, Martha, the world will not hold another man as blessed as I.”

Two or three times she had waved her hand as if she would stop me, but I paid no heed. When I was done she leaned back in her chair and shaded her face with her hands.

“It is all past now,” she repeated wearily. “I am so weak and tired”—

“I would take such care of you,” I broke in, eagerly. “Perhaps with care you would be well again in time. If not, I could at least wait upon you and watch by you when you suffer.”

“I can not—you are so good—but truly I can not, Joseph. Don’t think I don’t feel it all. I am sorry you care, because I can not give anything back, and yet I am a little glad, too, because it is a comfort to know one person would take me, poor, bruised creature that I am. But I can not. All such things are in the past now.”

“Don’t say that, Martha. Don’t try to give me an answer now. Think about it for a long time, until the newness has gone from the thought. Try to remember that I am never far away, that I am always thinking about you, that it is my dearest desire to serve you. Only try to get used to the possibility of such a future, Martha; that is all I ask of you now.”

She did not remove her hands, and her attitude showed such utter weariness that I reproached myself for having stayed so long.

“Good-by, Martha,” I whispered. I was not sure that

she heard me. At any rate, she did not answer, and I stole out softly and left her alone.

A few days later, as I was leaving the house after a talk with Rachel concerning business affairs, Martha slipped this note into my hand. It is yellow with age, and worn with much handling. I shall copy it here, and then burn it, for I could not bear the thought that it might fall into irreverent hands:

DEAR JOSEPH:—If I should think it over for many years, it would make no difference. What you ask for can not be. Sometime—I hope and pray it may be soon—you will know the reason why. Till then, you must be content to trust me.

I know what you have offered me, Joseph. I pray every day that you will be rewarded for your goodness. And you will be, for God remembers. MARTHA.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HEAVENLY GATES.

I do not now know how it was, or just when, that we accepted the fact that Martha was going to leave us. I am quite sure that it was Rachel who first mentioned it to me.

"She grows weaker every day," she said once, when I inquired for her sister. "She will never rally. Joseph, she is going away."

"Going away!" I repeated, with lips which seemed to be frozen.

"Going away—to God."

"Rachel—don't be so sure! She is so young—she may get well."

"Do you suppose I would be sure, if I could help it?" She bent her eyes upon me, and in them there was the prophecy of a loneliness almost unendurable. "No woman could suffer as she does, and go on living long, unless she were terribly strong, like me. I could not die of mental suffering, I suppose. I am like a tree, that gets strong by battling with the wind. But Martha is like a delicate flower that has been ground down by somebody's heel. It is not possible that she will ever hold up her head again."

"She is better suited to heaven than to earth," I said, with a feeble attempt at comfort for us both.

"She is eager to go—so eager that I think she hastens the time. She is only sorry—for Ray and me."

"Oh, Rachel, how can you bear it?"

“God gives strength. At first I thought I *could not* let her go. At times, I feared my old doubts would engulf me. But I held on—just simply held on. And then, I began to see. I saw that I could never make life over for my darling. God could, but even he needed a new world for it. Then I took my hands away, and gave her up to him.”

After this, I could not but notice Martha's rapid decline. Each time I saw her she seemed to have grown more frail in body, more heavenlike in spirit. Rachel was right. She was going away—to God.

What I am to tell you now was told to me by Stephen. He will not mind my setting it down, for it is the last scene in that life so unspeakably dear to us all.

Stephen remained with us during the last weeks of Martha's life, for his visits were a source of great comfort to her, and he would not deprive her of them. With him, more than with any one else, she allowed herself perfect freedom in the expression of her religious faith; and my brother told me that often, when he was with her, he felt himself to be on the very borderland of the upper country.

One day, when they were alone, she followed his prayer with a short petition of her own. She prayed for the salvation of sinners, for a higher life for Christians; then, in a trembling voice, she asked God to make her ready for his presence, and to take care of Rachel and Ray. She seemed to be in a kind of ecstasy of happiness and anticipation.

Her emotion seemed to exhaust her and she lay quiet for a time. Then she opened her eyes and fixed them wistfully upon Stephen.

“You have been very good to me,” said she. “I should

be glad to think, when I go away, that you will always be happy.”

“I shall be happy, I believe, Martha—happy in the work I love.”

She looked at him curiously. “I have a strange desire to see those I love happy,” she said. “I know happiness is not the highest thing, yet surely we ought not to put it out of our lives needlessly. Stephen, I am going to die, and you will let me talk to you as I could not if I were going to stay here. Have you ever loved any one—I mean, in the way people love each other when they would like to spend their lives together?”

For answer, Stephen bowed his head upon his hands and groaned aloud.

“Poor Stephen! I did not mean to hurt you so. Do—do I know her?”

Stephen nodded. “Did Rachel never tell you?” he asked.

“It is Rachel, then. I thought it was. No, she never talks about such things. We never chattered foolishness as other girls do. Perhaps it would have been better if we had. But—did you never tell her, Stephen?”

“Many times. I have promised not to do it any more, for it only brings unhappiness to us both.”

“Rachel is proud and reserved by nature, and it could never be easy for her to learn how to love. But, can’t you see that if she ever did care for a man, it would be more than any man was ever loved before?”

Stephen smiled. “I have never doubted that for one moment,” he said.

“Listen— I can not talk to her about such things. It has never been our habit, and she would guess that I had talked with you. I may be mistaken in my thought about it, but I want you to tell her just once more.”

Stephen shrank back. "I can not, Martha. It will grieve her, and to no purpose. I have her friendship now. It has been won through a hard fight, and it is worth a thousand times more than the love of any other woman. I can not forfeit it."

"You will not. Rachel knows that you are the best man in the world. I told her the other night that you were, and she said it was true. Such friendship can not be forfeited."

"No, Martha, I can not speak now. If a promise will comfort you, I will make this one: If there should come, in the future a time when I can speak without hurting Rachel, as I would hurt her now, I will speak once more. I can not do it yet."

"But I want you to do it now," persisted Martha. "If harm comes, I shall be more sorry than any one, but something tells me that you must not wait. Go and find Rachel, Stephen. She can not be far away. Please go quickly."

He started out, more because the tension of his feeling had become too great than because he really meant to do Martha's bidding.

In the orchard he found Rachel. She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading, and there was upon her face the look of sadness that she never allowed to rest there when she was with Martha.

That look was more than he could bear. In simple words he told his love, and asked her to let him try to comfort her. She lowered her head for a moment; then she raised her brave eyes to his, the greatest joy of her life shining through its greatest sorrow.

"I don't deserve it," she said humbly. "I have been so hard and bitter—I don't deserve it!"

Stephen never told me how he answered.

Presently they went in to Martha. She was asleep, and they sat down together beside her. When she awoke, she looked from one to the other with a question in her eyes.

"Martha," said Stephen, gently, "will you trust me to take care of Rachel?"

Her happiness was beyond words. She drew Rachel's face to hers and kissed it. Then she took from her hand an old-fashioned cameo ring.

"It was my mother's," she whispered. "Now it is almost too loose for me to wear, but Rachel's fingers were always slimmer than mine. Put it on her hand."

Stephen slipped the cameo on Rachel's finger, then raised the firm, slim hand to his lips. "Till death shall us two part," he said, solemnly.

Martha was silent for a moment, as if in deep thought. Then she said: "If it is not too much to ask, I want to see you married, before I die. Don't be vexed with me for saying so, Rachel dear; it will make me so happy to know that Stephen will have the right to take care of you and Ray. It is the only thing that will make me happier than I am now."

"You will surely live till then, Martha. You are wonderfully bright and well to-day," Rachel told her.

"When is 'then'? I mean now—at once. It would make me so happy!"

It was strange how she dwelt on this word "happy"—she whose short life had been so full of pain.

"Why should we wait, Rachel?" Stephen asked. "We are not young any more, and we know each other. Martha has spoken the truth. I ought to have the right to take care of you."

Why should they wait, indeed? Rachel had no heart for guests and gowns. There had been one fine wedding

in the Sylvestre home, and no one wished to revive the mockery of it

I was despatched for Bro. Cady, and found him in a neighboring town, debating with a Universalist.

"You are too hard on that poor fellow," I told him, after listening to the argument for half an hour. "You must have forgotten how lately you came over that road yourself."

"I have forgotten nothing of the kind," Bro. Cady assured me. "But I'll have him understand that he needn't waste his time arguing against Calvinism when he's debating with *me*."

The debate was nearly over, and in the afternoon Bro. Cady returned with me, enlivening the journey with accounts of the pranks of his baby son, John W. Cady.

"My wife was firm about the name," he said, "though she is rather less of a Methodist now than I am. Her father and grandfather had both been 'John Wesley,' you see. But I told her 'John Wesley' would never do, so we compromised on 'John Washington.'"

At ten o'clock the next morning, Stephen and Rachel were married. They chose this hour because it was the time of day when Martha felt her best. She was propped up in her large chair in the living-room, and her face had in it more of joy than I had seen there since the time when she first showed little Ray to me.

There were no guests present except Bro. Cady, my parents and myself. I think this day was the consummation of many a secret longing on the part of my dear mother. Even in the days when she had feared Rachel's influence over Stephen, she had loved the girl, and felt that the two were somehow intended for each other.

I do not think Rachel had a new gown for the occasion. She looked to me just as she had always looked, except

more gentle and womanly than ever before. Perhaps I have said somewhere that Rachel was one of those women who have the gift of looking perfectly neat at all times and in the midst of all kinds of work, and who never, even on the most formal occasion, appeared to be elaborately dressed. To-day, as she came out and held out her hand to me, I said to myself what I had often said before, that she was the most beautiful woman in the world, except the one who was soon to leave it forever.

After the ceremony, Stephen and Rachel knelt together beside Martha's chair. She folded their hands together between her own, and said tenderly, "God bless you, and make you very useful together, my dear brother and sister!"

Then she asked my mother, who was holding little Ray, to put the child in Rachel's arms.

"She is yours, dear," Martha said—"yours and Stephen's. It isn't often that a mother can leave her child and feel so sure that all is well. She is a little willful, but you will understand, and will make a noble woman of her. I pray every moment that she may give you love and complete obedience, in return for all the sacrifice she will cost you. If you should sometime feel like giving her your name, please remember that it would have made me very glad. The name of Arrondale is a good one, and has never brought us anything but happiness. But tell her about her poor mother, and that she prayed for her baby until the last."

We were all in tears except the speaker. Her eyes were dry, and heavenly bright. As she raised them, she caught sight of me, and I fancy that a great wave of pity came over her.

"Let Joseph love Ray a great deal," she said. "Ray is very fond of Joe."

She had not used this little nickname since our childhood. It was the last word I ever heard her speak. The strain was too great, and I slipped away to be alone.

Stephen and Rachel carried her to her bed. She never left it, though she lived for nearly a week after this. During this time she seemed to be conscious, although she seldom spoke, and never expressed a wish of any kind. All the eagerness of the past few weeks was gone. The things for which she had continued to live were accomplished, and she was done with life.

One evening, just at sunset, she opened her eyes and looked into the radiant west.

“Ah!” she said, “it is sweet to die when the sun is going down.”

Rachel bent over her in sudden apprehension.

“Kiss me!” Martha whispered.

The kiss was given quickly, but none too soon, for already the dear lips were turning cold.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST WORD.

I am near the end of the big book in which I have been writing, and the story of fifty years must be put into a few pages. And I am well content that it should be so; for it is upon the days of our youth that we old folks like best to dwell. The age at which life is new is the age at which its events make the greatest impression upon us.

My father and mother lived to a good age. Dear mother held the eldest grandchild of Stephen and Rachel in her arms before she was called hence.

"We are going to name the baby for you, grandma," said Rachel's son, Sylvestre Arrondale the First.

"Nonsense!" said mother, with her old spirit. "I never thought Abigail a pretty name, and I'm not going to have this dear baby burdened with it. Why not honor Joseph this time and call the baby Josephine?"

And Josephine was the baby's name.

Mother went away two years before father. She had thought it would be otherwise, and when asked if she were ready to go, answered, "If Samuel can spare me for a little while. But I always thought he would need me at the end."

Then he laid his face against hers, and whispered that it would be but a very little while, and that he would bear the loneliness, for her sake. So the two white-haired lovers parted.

After my mother died, the look of girlishness that we loved came back into her face. "She looks as she did

when we were little children," Stephen whispered to me. And I knew that it was so.

Father bore his loneliness bravely, as he had said he would. He kept his interest in life to the last, and his shrewd humor never failed. But when a slight illness came he lay down, quietly content, and sure that it would be the last. So it proved to be, and, remembering the love that had never grown old, we could not grieve for him.

After this, my home was with Stephen and Rachel. Indeed, it is with them still, and we three share a happy old age together.

Rachel's five children are all sons, and all Arrondales. They made men of my father's type—men who loved God, wrought righteousness, and turned up fortunes by their thrift and shrewdness. They are the best gift given to the world by a father and mother whose lives have been full of unselfish benefactions.

The best gift, perhaps I should say, except one. Strangely enough, the only one of the children of this home who resembled Rachel was the child who was not her own. At first we watched little Ray for a likeness to Martha, and were disappointed when we did not find it. But by degrees we grew used to her as she was, and content with a charm which could scarcely have been greater. As she grew older, we saw in her Rachel's mental powers, and Rachel's strength of will. With the atmosphere of love and admiration about her, there might have been danger that such a nature would become assertive and domineering; but Ray was guided by a loving woman who read the girl's heart through her own.

"I want to have Ray a happier girl than I was," said Rachel. "But I do not want to have her a spoiled girl."

She had her wish. Ray's intelligence and vivacity

had added to them, as years went by, a gracious womanliness which drew to her every heart. Inevitably and immediately, she became the center of every social circle she entered. The children of the several Arrondale households know that their beautiful Aunt Ray has been fairy godmother to them all. They have heard of her early and romantic marriage to a man high in the counsels of the nation. They have been told how, first in Columbus, and then in Washington, she used her social gifts to confer happiness, and especially to honor the religion of Christ. They know, too, that her great tenderness for them, and for all children, is partly because of a little grave where her only child sleeps.

The little grave is in the old graveyard at Blue Brook; and beside the slender shaft which marks it is a simple stone with this inscription:

“MARTHA:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Ray early learned her mother's story, and I remember that once she said, as if in self-reproach, “I wonder if I do not hate my father's memory—just a little!”

But, naturally, the story of the past seemed vague and far away. She was near to middle life when an incident made it real.

In Washington, she came to know a Congressman from a Western State, by the name of Redding. She asked her husband to learn the Westerner's first name, and found that it was Mark. The discovery saddened her at first, then she learned to be grateful, that this man, whose blood was so closely allied to hers, wore the stamp of manhood and usefulness. She invited him to her house,

and she and her husband made themselves useful to him in many ways.

"Some day I shall tell him who I am," she said to her husband. "Some day I shall tell that he is my brother, and that he has my real love and interest."

But she never did. His gratitude to her was unbounded, and, in return for her interest, he one day confided in her the sad story of his childhood. From this story, Ray found that he had never been told of his father's marriage to Martha. It was thus that poor Emily Redding had fulfilled the dying wish of her scapegrace husband.

"Since she did not tell him, I shall not," Ray said. "She deserves that from me—poor lady!"

Stephen, Rachel and I! The young folks come and go, and their interests are our chief concern, but, after all, we three grayheads have some things in common that the present generation can not share. Was there ever an old man blest as I am, in being the third in such a trio?

Stephen is bent, as well as gray, but Rachel's erectness is the pride of her granddaughters, with whom "as straight as grandma" is the ideal of elegance in a womanly figure. Her eyes are keen, and look out from under jet-black brows, although her hair has been snow-white for twenty years.

Stephen seldom preaches now, but his talks at the communion table are a feast to the soul. He is a veritable Gamaliel to a circle of young preachers, who delight to sit at his feet and listen to his teaching. Among these are two of the Sylvestre-Arrondale boys, and this is compensation to Rachel, who long grieved in secret because none of her own sons chose the calling of their father.

Stephen has many times told me that to him it is a marvel all but too great for comprehension, that the people with whom he allied himself in those early days

of hardship and persecution, should have grown, during his own ministry, to such numbers and influence.

“But I am glad I lived and worked when I did,” he always adds. “We are growing a bit comfortable and complaisant, and comfort and complaisance would not suit me as well as the old heroic days. I am glad I lived when I did.”

In heroic days, Stephen surely has lived heroically. He has kept back no part of the price of a noble ministry. He has spent and been spent, asking for no man’s gold or silver or apparel, but often in cold and hunger and weariness he has preached the gospel of simplicity and power.

His reward has been great. Thousands honor him as their father in the gospel. He has taught a multitude who have themselves become teachers, and thus the power of his life has touched a host of those whom he has never seen.

Few men have done as much, but I am inclined to think that no man has ever had such a helper. Remembering my dear mother, remembering, too, the pure saint who has been in glory for so many years, I still say deliberately that Rachel is the best woman I have ever known. What she has been to the needy, the sorrowful and the wayward is written only in heaven. What she has been to me, the lonely pilgrim, I dare not trust myself to say. Without her counsels and her ministries, the pilgrimage would have been a weary one indeed.

I have shown many of these pages to her, and we have laughed together over the story of her perversity. But I shall not show her this page, for she has ever been chary of praise, except when it comes from Stephen, from whom she has learned to regard it as a matter of course.

For a perfect surrender to the man she loves, commend me to the woman of strong will and strong character.

When she makes a choice, her reason is behind it, and she will stand by it to the uttermost. However, this is merely a piece of an old man's moralizing, and you need not read it into the story unless you choose.

"When I loved you so long," I once heard Stephen say to Rachel, "did you believe that I would win you in the end?"

"No," answered Rachel, with her wifely smile (indeed, now, she has quite a different smile for her children and grandchildren, and one which they know well). "No, I did not think so. But sometimes I was terribly afraid you might!"

.
Maude Arrondale just came in and put her pretty hands over my eyes.

"Uncle Joseph, you *must* stop writing," she commanded. "Why, your poor old eyes will be put out altogether if you go on in this light!"

Now, I usually mind Maude, because I like her. And I like her for several reasons. She is a dear young thing, to begin with; then, she is the wife of Sylvestre the Second and the mother of Sylvestre the Third. And, by no means least, she is the granddaughter of that staunch old friend of our household, Bro. Cady. (I tell her this is why she is uncompromisingly rigid in her orthodoxy.)

"I am almost done," I told her. "Let me finish this page, and I promise you I will write no more for many a day."

So she has left me, and I must keep my word. What, then, shall I say at the end?

I can only repeat what I said at the beginning—that my long life has been encompassed with mercies, that I am glad I have lived, and that I shall be glad to die.

THE END.

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